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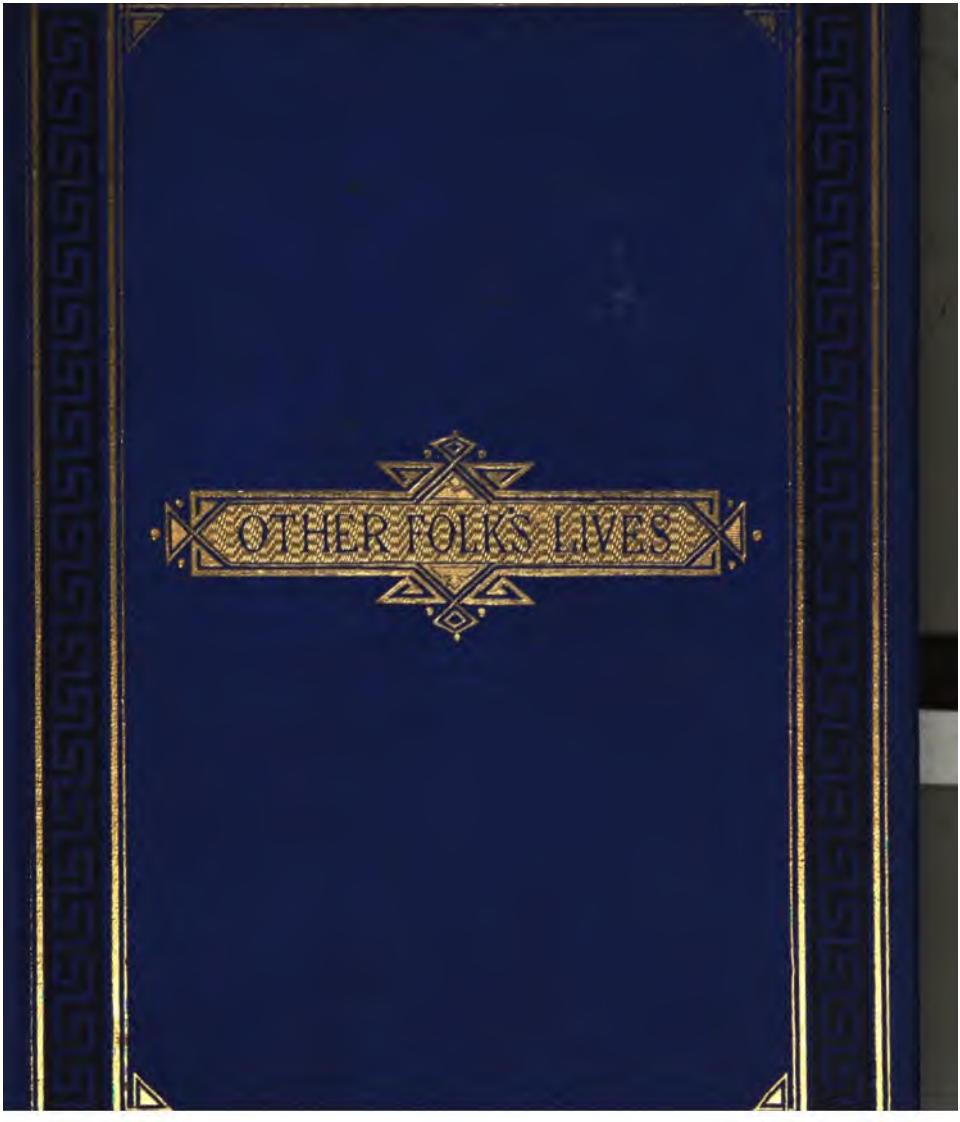
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OTHER FOLKS LIVES


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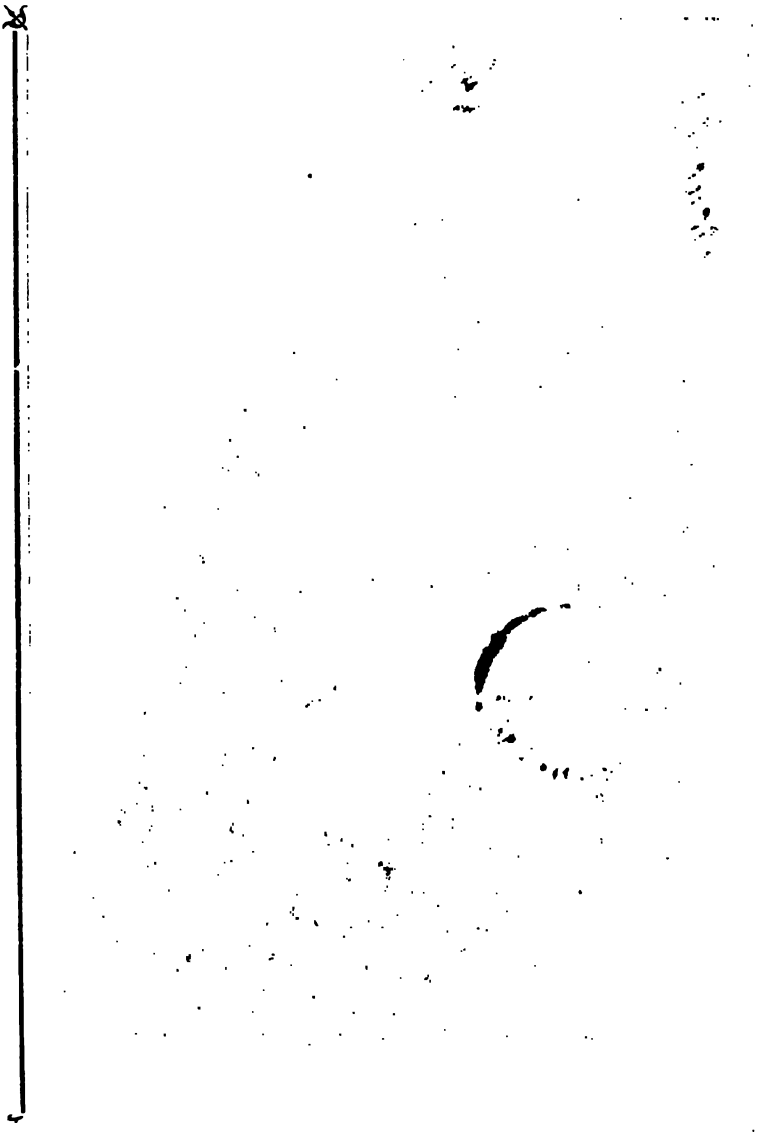




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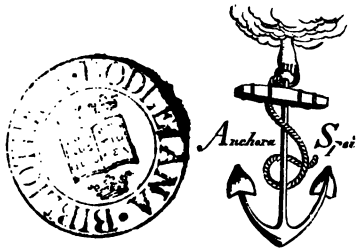




OTHER FOLK'S LIVES

By MENELLA B. SMEDLEY

AUTHOR OF "LADY GRACE," ETC.



STRAHAN & CO. PUBLISHERS

56 LUDGATE HILL, LONDON

1869

250. c. 288.

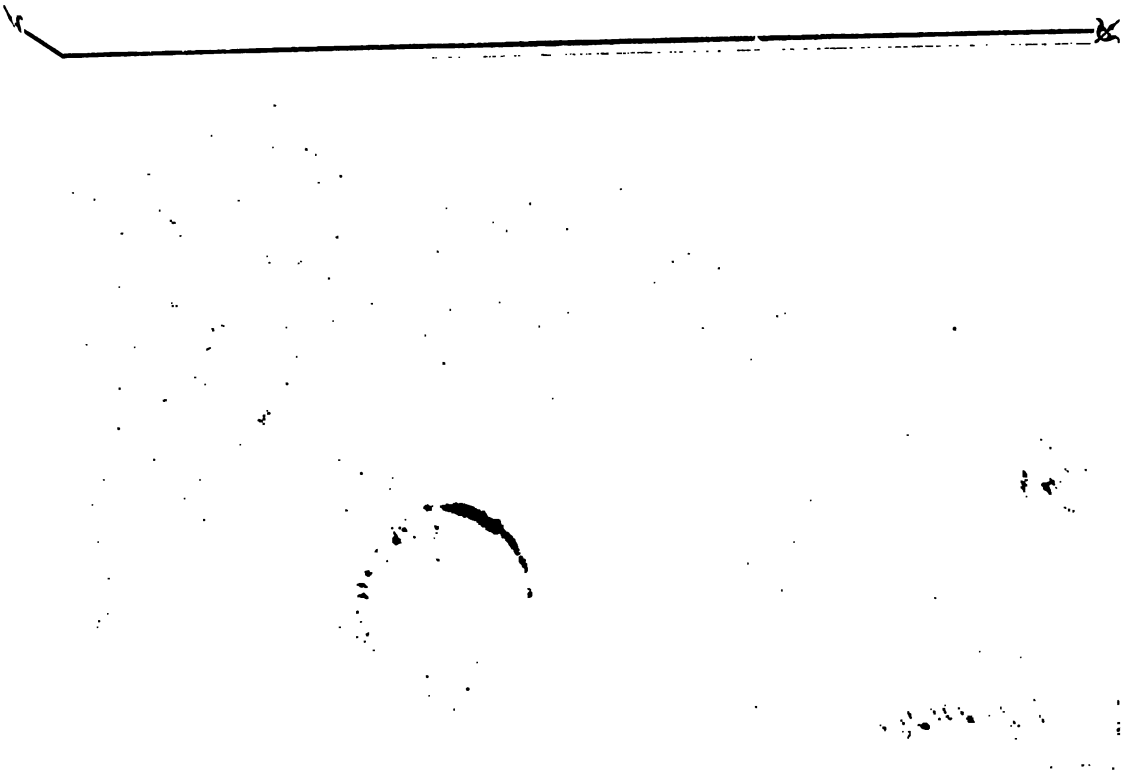
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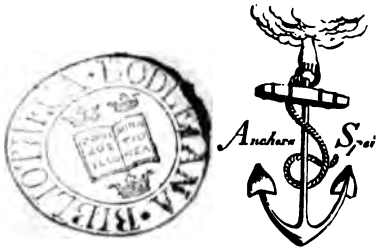
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TWICE LOST.

I.—LOOKING FOR WORK.

"'AS companion or governess, a lady, aged thirty-eight, perfectly conversant with French and Italian, and with the ordinary course of an English education.'"

"Say 'usual,' not 'ordinary,'" said my father. "Always take the simplest word you can find, unless you are writing poetry."

"I don't see much difference," replied I. But I made the desired correction.

"Need you put your age so exactly?" asked Emma.

"Would you have her put it *in*exactly?" grumbled my father. "No, no; let that stand. Always give as many facts as you can in an advertisement, but beware of suggesting any deduction from them. You want to impart a certain amount of knowledge concerning yourself. That you can do. But if you beguile your reader into making a fancy portrait of you, it is sure to be utterly unlike; and the result is either disappointment when you meet,

or an adverse conclusion beforehand, founded on some erroneous notion of the shape of your nose. Go on, Jane."

"As if one could prevent people from drawing fancy portraits!" said I. "That depends on the reader, not on the writer. Two epithets make a picture for some people, while two pages of description would fail to make one for others."

"Thirty-eight is not an epithet," observed my father. "Go on, and don't talk nonsense. Epithets are just the very things you have to avoid. We want bald facts, and the balder the better."

"Facts generally do grow bald under criticism," retorted I; "I know that. But hair is natural, and I like it better. Now I'll go on."

My father and I never ceased arguing from morning till night when we were at leisure. I resumed my reading in a hurry, because I saw a retort coming as soon as he should have finished his mouthful of toast, and I wanted to forestall it. "'She teaches drawing without the aid of a master.' That's the next sentence."

"Humph!" said my father. "'Help' is a better word than 'aid.' And if you were to add that she draws fancy portraits on the smallest provocation, it might be as well."

I was a little nettled, and my answer came quickly. "If you don't think me competent to teach drawing without a master, only say so, and I'll strike it out."

"Nonsense, child," said he, softly, and with a certain moisture in his kind eyes.

I knew how proud he was of my painting, and how much it grieved him that the need for immediate work

that should *pay* prevented me from attempting the uphill beginning of a professional artist's career. So I went on appeased. "'As she is not musical, and has not much experience with children, she prefers the situation of chaperon or companion to that of governess.' Will that do?"

"I hate the word 'chaperon' and the thing companion," cried he. "But I don't see how an unpleasant thing can be said in less unpleasant language—so it may pass. You have a right to your own choice in the matter."

"Anything is better than having to do discipline for children without the natural instinct of love as a basis," replied I; "and I *know* I am not fit for it. There may be much anxiety about older girls, but there is not the same incessant responsibility. It is part of one's duty to a girl of seventeen to accustom her to judge and to act for herself; she must be influenced rather than governed, and the workings of her mind must necessarily be let alone sometimes. But a child! where everything is yet to be, and nothing *is*. I should feel responsible for every one of its gestures. I should never leave it at peace for a moment. I should be always sifting and sowing the seeds of the future. I should harass it and myself into a fever in a month."

"They are such dear little things," said Emma to herself, while my father answered me.

"I have very little doubt that you would. The deliberation with which you proclaim your fault, shows that you have no chance of conquering it. Well, you must learn from experience. *I* am inclined to think that you will find seventeen at least as troublesome as seven to a tender

conscience. And my last word to you in either case is—harden yourself."

"And mine," exclaimed Emma, "is—don't! No good was ever done to anybody by hardening, I am sure. "My dear old Jane," (kissing me), "I only hope your pupils won't harden you."

"Don't gush, Emma," said my father, shortly.

"A little gushing refreshes one sometimes," I observed, receiving the kiss, and smiling in return for it. I was as undemonstrative as my father, and had no notion of doing what he called "setting a seal of sentiment upon one's breakfasts and dinners."

I went on with my reading. "'She would take the sole charge of a family or household, if required.'"

"Kick out 'if required,'" interposed my father; "and imagine yourself taking such a charge if *not* required. Two superfluous words, betokening, as superfluous words always do, a little vagueness and confusion of thought."

"Not at all," said I, stoutly. "Betokening a little difficulty in turning a sentence. I think, now, the sentence looks awkward without them."

"'*Would*' is your difficulty. Alter that."

"'She is capable of undertaking the sole charge,'" began I.

"Phew!" interrupted my father. "'Capable of *undertaking*'—that's a very questionable sort of capability. 'Competent to the charge' would be more to the purpose."

"Well to oblige you, so it shall be. But if there were time I could dispute that. Then comes the last sentence,

which is the most important of all. 'Full testimonials given and required, and a high salary expected.'"

Emma was astonished at this. "Oh, if I were you, dear," said she, in mild expostulation, "I wouldn't put in about expecting a high salary till they had seen you."

My father knew that Emma's English was hopeless, and he therefore never troubled her with criticisms. But he was as anxious to confute and subdue her when they differed (which was always) as though she had expressed her meaning in Johnsonian periods. Only he disputed the matter of her speeches—the matter and the manner of mine.

"No," said he, authoritatively; "that is the sole stroke of genius in the composition. I give you so much credit for that, Jane, that I almost think I must have suggested it myself. *They* (to adopt your pronoun, Emma), let them be who they may, will think twice as highly of Jane when they see her, if they are prepared for the spectacle by that judicious claim. Perhaps if they saw her with absolutely unprejudiced eyes, they might not admit it. Besides, it limits the probable number of answers. Put the thing up, Jane, and send it off at once, without further discussion."

I did as I was told. It was an anxious time when the answers to my advertisement arrived, and our debates upon them seemed interminable. I almost suspected my father of a resolution to find none of them acceptable, in order that he might prevent me from leaving home at all; yet he had not opposed the plan. Indeed, the two years during which we tried to live on the reduced income which our great loss had left us, had proved to us that it

was simply impossible to do so. We were in debt already. My father worked hard for reviews and magazines, and was becoming a regular literary hack, though one of a high class. But he could not maintain three people on his earnings—or at least he did not. I have no doubt that we managed very badly. We were none of us used to economy, and it was late in life to begin it. We made a great parade to ourselves of saving unnecessary sixpences, and let sovereigns slip through our fingers during the operation. We were like inexperienced, well-meaning chess-players, who take the most anxious care of the safe part of their game, while by some flagrant oversight they give the enemy an inglorious victory in a moment. It was not that we shrank from self-denial. We really suffered a good deal. I am sure *I* suffered when I was darning my stockings—and doing it so badly, too. I had an artist's sense of the aspect of a perfect darn, but I had no idea of the means by which it was to be produced, and I never produced it. And Emma—still so pretty and elegant—so delicately nice in all her notions and ways—she had enough to suffer on her own part. I almost cried when she came in one day to show me, with genuine glee, a spray of French artificial flowers which she had found; a little worthless relic which had somehow escaped the sale. "It was so much better than anything we could afford to buy now; it would make her bonnet look *delightful.*" I watched her quick fingers arranging it—caressing it with every touch; and sorry as I felt for her, I rather rejoiced in my heart that I was myself "a strong-minded woman." She looked up, saw my grave face, and with an

instant change in the expression of her own, nobly offered to give *me* the flowers if I wished for them. Poor, dear Emma!

At last I was fairly embarked in a correspondence which seemed likely to terminate in an engagement. The "references" had proved quite satisfactory on both sides, and an interview was appointed. My charge was to be "one young lady, aged seventeen"—just what I thought I should like best. I was told that she was "of good abilities, but imperfect education," and that there were "peculiar circumstances, which would be explained to the lady undertaking the charge, which rendered it necessary that she should be a person in whom entire confidence might be placed." It was the father who wrote to me; his letters were unmistakably those of a gentleman. His name was Langley, and I found on inquiry that he was one of our greatest capitalists—a man whose prudent daring had already doubled the vast fortune which a father's skill and industry had bequeathed to him. I have no talent for finance, whether on a large or small scale, and I do not attempt to explain the nature of his successful enterprises. It is enough to say that he was a kind of god in the business world, and that his name was uttered in that subdued tone of profound reverence with which sportsmen mention the man who has killed a fabulous number of woodcocks in a morning, or pretenders to athletic eminence refer to the hero whose cool stride takes him easily over the longest stretches of difficult country and brings him in among his weary companions as fresh as they were when they first started. I notice that this kind of deference is

reserved almost exclusively for physical and material achievements, and I wonder why it should be so. In other spheres—in Art, in War, in Politics—it seems now to be a point of honour to speak coarsely of the faults of great men, and to find or make as much food as possible for hungry ridicule out of their foibles. Bnt Englishmen are tender with the failings of Assheton Smith, and would fain hide from themselves the painful fact that Tom Sayers allowed himself to be reconciled twice a day for money.

The day fixed for my interview arrived, and having steadily declined my father's offer to escort me (I always wish to meet my fate alone, whether in great things or small), I indulged myself with a cab, and descended from it, cool, steady, and expectant, at the door of the huge Belgravian house to which I had been summoned.

"Mark my words," said my father, before I started, "you are going to be imposed upon. These millionaires always drive hard bargains. You had better take me with you to see all fair."

"And Emma, too, to keep the peace when you have contradicted Mr. Langley till he can bear it no longer. No, thank you."

My father looked at me with unfeigned surprise. "*I* contradict," said he innocently. "I was really going to give you a little caution on that head, Jane. It irritates a man to be differed from unnecessarily at every word—be on your guard—it s a bad habit out of one's own home—men don't like it, I assure you."

"Women don't mind it in the least," rejoined I, as I ran off to my cab.

II.—WORK FOUND.

I was shown into just the sort of superb drawing-room which I expected to see, and need not describe. While I was kept waiting—not more than five minutes—I tried to eke out the notions of a character which I had derived from Mr. Langley's letters, by observations upon his daily *entourage*. In this room I shall be able to find out something about the women of the family, at any rate, thought I. There was perfect taste in the ornamentation—a nice arrangement of colour, and no overloading in the details—it was neither a museum nor a show-room. Symptoms of foreign travel were discoverable. On each wall hung a single picture, and at each picture I could have looked for a day. A portfolio of sketches lay open on an ottoman; the uppermost, a Campagna study at sunset, was so good, that I could not help lifting it to look at the next. I was fairly fascinated; the drawings were all Italian—slight and rapid, but with the breath of the South in every one of them. Many of the subjects I knew; some among the figure groups I could fancy that I had seen; they brought back happy days to me, and kindled my one enthusiasm to its highest. I shamefully forgot my errand and my prospects, and was on my knees at the ottoman, minutely examining a little marine study marked "Aci Reale," and trying to detect the secret of a peculiar manipulation in the waves which seemed to me excellent, when a pleasant voice disturbed me.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Miss Derwent. Ah! don't apologise. If you care to look through those sketches more at leisure, I hope you will have the opportu-

nity. You have paid them such a pleasant compliment already that you may be sure of finding the artist in a good humour."

Mr. Langley's manner was irresistibly frank and gentle, and I smiled my answer. "I am a little ashamed of showing so soon that I can forget business for pleasure."

By this time we were seated. Our eyes met. We looked steadily and inquiringly at each other, each with a half smile which seemed to say, "You know that I want to find you out, and it is mere waste of time and trouble to try to disguise it." The result of my examination was as follows:—Mr. Langley was about fifty years old, tall, slightly built, and decidedly elegant in appearance. He had a look of ill-health, a slight contraction about the forehead and mouth, which suggested the idea that he had at some time endured severe pain. Tic, said I to myself, or rheumatism in some shape; a medical reason for the residence in Italy, I have no doubt. His smile was delightful, and the tone of his voice so cordial, that it warmed you to listen to it. A perfect temper, thought I, that is unmistakable; the frown comes from suffering—there is no mental irritability in it; but rather a determined picture. The eyes were remarkably soft and steadfast; they looked at you quietly, yet so fixedly, that it was not quite so easy to look at them. They betokened, I thought, intellect, penetration, and sincerity. The chin was a little too prominent; there was evidently decision and firmness, which might have amounted to obstinacy had the temperament been less gentle. I never saw a face that told the character more clearly, nor a manner that corresponded

more agreeably to the indications of the countenance. I was perfectly satisfied with my observations, and began to feel not a little anxious as to the impression I was producing myself. I was not left long in doubt.

"Let me tell you at once," said Mr. Langley, "that I have been making the minutest inquiries about you, and that I have commanded some channels of information to which you may not have suspected that I could gain access. I know where you were born, how you have been brought up, whom you have known; in fact, you have nothing to tell me, but I have everything to tell you. I intended to offer you this situation before I saw you. My intention is confirmed now. It is for you to say whether you can accept it."

"Thank you much for speaking so plainly," answered I. "I have, of course, some questions to ask. I,—perhaps you will tell me—"

I am not in the least shy or nervous, but I felt strangely embarrassed when I found myself coming to the point. My companion relieved me instantly.

"You want to know what your duties will be if you decide on accepting the situation, and what the peculiar circumstances are to which my letter alluded?"

I bowed. "Those would have been my first questions," said I.

He smiled. "Oh, there are others to follow, I know; and I will answer all in time, whether asked or unasked. The duties are not agreeable. I tell you that fairly—they are not agreeable."

He rose, and took a turn through the room. I waited

in silent attention. He sat down again, and I again encountered his calm, steady gaze. I began to think there was more habitual melancholy in it than I had at first perceived.

"This young lady," said he with a little hesitation in voice and manner, "this young lady, my daughter, requires —is likely to require for some time—a more than common amount of care and superintendence. We want to find a companion for her whom we can trust thoroughly and entirely."

He paused, and I felt as if I must make some answer. "Is she to be introduced into society?" I asked.

"Quite the reverse," replied he quickly. "Your life will be in the country, and in complete retirement. You will have absolute control over the establishment. But I am afraid you will have very little liberty. Your time will be filled."

"I remember," said I, "that your first letter mentioned a neglected education—"

"I don't mean," interrupted he, "that your time will be filled with giving lessons. I shall be very glad if you can induce your pupil by degrees to take an interest in the cultivation of her mind, in accomplishments, in any pursuit, in short. It will be a step gained."

I began to feel exceedingly uneasy. "I am almost afraid," said I, "that I am incompetent; that it will be better to decline the task at once. If there is—any—I beg your pardon—any mental peculiarity—"

"I see what you are thinking," answered he, gravely, "but there is no ground for your fear. My daughter's

abilities are excellent, though, unavoidably, they have been very little cultivated. She was born at Rio Janeiro, where I was for a time, and she was left there, with her mother's family, till she was twelve years old. Our difficulties are not of the kind that you suspect; they are difficulties of temper and of conduct."

"I am afraid," said I, when he paused again, "that this is a very painful explanation for you. I wish I could spare you; but it is necessary that I should quite understand what is proposed to me."

"I am fully alive to the necessity," said he; "I am chiefly fearful that I may give you an erroneous idea of the case. It is difficult to measure exactly the impression which our words produce on the mind of a person to whom we present a perfectly new idea, which is all the while familiar to ourselves. I want to make you understand clearly, if I can. Miss Langley has for some time given great trouble —caused serious anxiety—to her mother and myself. Her temper is, as I said, exceedingly difficult. She is a very handsome girl, and she has a keen appetite for admiration. It is, I grieve to say, something more than the mere giddiness and vanity, which in judicious hands gradually correct themselves; and something more stringent than the possible discipline of home is necessary. There has been already lightness of behaviour—forwardness—and we want to check and save her in time."

My face must have expressed the dismay I felt, for he stopped a moment, looked hard at me, and then added hastily,—

"Do not refuse in a hurry; hear all that I have to say

first. We are well aware of the disagreeable nature of the office that we propose to you; we are deeply anxious to obtain for it such a person as yourself; we offer a salary of two hundred pounds, and we secure it, under all circumstances, for two years."

This was indeed a "consideration." I felt that I had no right to refuse such an offer, unless I believed myself (which I did not) absolutely unable to fulfil the duties required of me.

"I am not ashamed to confess," said I, "that the largeness of the salary tempts me. If it were not a matter of importance to me, I should not be here at all."

"I understand you," he answered, "and respect your frankness. That there has been as yet no irredeemable imprudence on this poor girl's part, you will believe when I tell you that she is at this moment alone with her younger sister. But I wish you to understand that she really requires"—he spoke slowly and emphatically—"to be saved from herself. She is to be sent for the present into seclusion, and there is no attempt to conceal from her that she is in disgrace, and that she is to be under the strictest surveillance. We hope that you may acquire influence over her mind, and that long before the expiration of the two years, you and she may be members of our family circle, and that all may be forgiven and forgotten. But, for the present, her retirement is to be complete, and your vigilance unbounded. I need not tell you the precise circumstances which have induced us to adopt this measure. It is enough to say, that we believe it to be absolutely necessary, and that we have tried several other plans without success."

"Is any rule of life prescribed to us?" asked I.

He marked with a glance of evident satisfaction, that the form of the question showed me to be at least considering his proposition.

"None," he replied, "except the exclusion of all visitors for the present. You will be guided by your own judgment as to the best mode of occupying and interesting her. You will communicate with me as fully and frequently as you like. I shall escort you to your residence, and I shall give you full instructions in writing before we part. Some troublesome restrictions we are compelled to impose upon you. You must sleep in the same room as your pupil, and you must watch her: that is the beginning and end of my lesson. WATCH her. She is in a rebellious state, and her misdirected talents make her very difficult to manage. She may try to escape from you, and she may try to circumvent you. She must not be allowed to write or to receive any letters which you do not see. Arrangements will be made to facilitate this, and indeed all your tasks, as much as possible. The servants whom I have selected know just enough of the real state of the case to prevent them from thwarting or impeding you. The lady's-maid is, unavoidably, in our confidence, and she may occasionally be allowed to relieve guard when you need a little freedom. But it is hardly necessary to say, that you must allow yourself this indulgence as seldom as possible. The vigilance of a servant is more irksome and less effectual than that of a friend; and as a friend I hope Maude will soon learn to look upon you. In short, Miss Derwent," with a melancholy smile which touched me deeply, "it is

the position of a gaoler which we offer you, but a gaoler whose business it is to reform the prisoner, and render her fit for liberty."

I listened patiently and anxiously, weighing the requirements of the case, and my own capabilities, at every sentence. I cannot say that I felt attracted by my task; my chief thought was, that I believed I could do it, and that it was, under the circumstances, worth doing.

"Am I to understand," I inquired, after a short pause, "that there is any visitor to be specially excluded—any correspondent that you dread more than others? I hope you will not think that I press you unnecessarily on this painful subject, but if there is, I think I ought to know."

"You are right," said he, while a slight flush passed over his face. "There has been—more than one. The last affair produced the crisis which has led to the arrangement we are now making. I don't think it is likely to be followed up; but the safest plan will be to send all letters for Miss Langley to me, and I will return those which it is fit that she should receive. I don't want to keep you in the dark, Miss Derwent," he added, in a tone of much kindness: "there are other particulars which will doubtless come out as our acquaintance improves. But I think I have said enough for a beginning—enough to enable you to make your decision."

"You assure me," said I, feeling that the important moment was come, "that there is no mental disease?"

"None whatever."

"Nor any tendency to it?"

"Nor any tendency to it. There is no such tendency in her family on either side."

"Is her health good?" I asked. "I think you are yourself an invalid."

"You are quite mistaken," he rejoined, speaking for the first time with a little sharpness. "My health is excellent, and so is my daughter's. She is a little hysterical occasionally, and there is a little Southern languor about her; but I think that country air and judicious treatment are likely to conquer both these evils."

"And—excuse me for asking one more question—"

"Ask as many as you please," said he, cordially. "I want you to see your way as clearly as possible before you commit yourself."

"Well, then," I said, "may I press you so far as to inquire what good points there are on which I may hope to work? Do you really think—can you honestly say—that there is ground for expecting that I may be able to produce any substantial improvement?"

"Honestly," he replied, "I think there is. She has great generosity; she has strong impulses of affection and self-devotion; she has undeniable talent, and a latent enthusiasm which, if once enlisted on the right side, might work miracles. The worst evil with which you have to contend is—you see how open I am with you—want of truth. It is that which has baffled us. I hope that it is not incurable. I know that it is not an uncommon fault, during youth, in those whose childhood has been passed like this poor girl's—I mean among half-educated equals and scarcely half-civilised servants. But you must be on your

guard against it: it is for the present inherent and all-pervading. It is not mere exaggeration or misrepresentation; if you should succeed in getting on easy terms with her, you must be prepared for positive fiction."

"That is bad," said I. "I think conscientiousness is the hardest of all lessons to those who have grown up in ignorance of it. Has she any sense of religion?"

"I think she has religious feelings, but she is excitable, and we have been a little afraid of working that vein. If done wisely, it might accomplish all we want."

"I will try at least," I exclaimed. "Generous, affectionate, though, perhaps, waywardly and intermittently so —and with good abilities. She ought to be reclaimable. The untruthfulness frightens me; but I will try."

"I must not say I will hold you to your word," cried Mr. Langley, with a look of so much pleasure that it might almost be called triumphant; "but have you not accepted?"

"Before I say an irrevocable Yes, I should like, if it is possible, to see Miss Langley."

"That you shall do instantly," answered he, ringing the bell. "But I warn you that you will not see her to advantage. She knows—it is very difficult to keep anything from her which she is determined to discover—she knows the purpose of your coming, and she is, of course, unwilling to put her neck under the yoke, poor child."

"Perhaps it is well to see the worst at first."

"It is certainly well," returned he, gravely, "if it does not dishearten you. That would be so great an evil that I cannot but shrink from it."

A footman answered the bell. "Are the young ladies in the boudoir?" inquired his master.

"Yes, sir."

"Show this lady to them. I shall see you again before you go," said Mr. Langley, bowing slightly to me. "I shall wait here for you."

I followed the servant; and steady as my nerves are, I confess that my heart beat a little faster than usual when he opened the boudoir door and announced me.

III.—A PLEASANT BEGINNING.

A pretty, delicate-looking fair girl came forward to receive me, with a shy sort of cordiality that was very attractive. For a moment I was dumb with wonder; but I remembered that there was a "younger sister," and felt that this could not be my charge.

"Maude, dear," said she, in a coaxing voice, "this is Miss Derwent;" then turning to me, "My sister is not very well to-day. Will you sit down?"

I sat down, with one furtive glance at the window, towards which she had turned in introducing me. It was difficult to prevent the glance from fixing, for the picture there had a singular and painful fascination.

There she sat—my future pupil, without a doubt. From the superb development of her figure, she might have been twenty rather than seventeen. Her attitude, as she lay back in a folding chair, with an open book on her knee, at which she never looked, and her profile steadily presented to the room, was a perfect study of listlessness and disquietude. The beauty of her face was astonishing, the

expression the most repulsive that I ever saw; she looked the incarnation of sullenness, resentment, and defiance. Immense hazel eyes, staring straight forward at nothing; black eyebrows, and black eyelashes of unusual length, curled at the tips; masses of hair, several shades lighter than the eyebrows, heaped into a net, and hanging upon the shoulder, so as to define with great precision the delicate contour of cheek and throat; a complexion of that peculiar ivory transparency in which the faintest bloom looks like a flush, and seems about to fade away before our eyes; a straight nose, with deeply curved nostrils, and lips finely formed, but a little too full, though this, perhaps, arose rather from the fixed pout upon them than from their natural proportion—these were the features of the picture. When her sister named me she did not turn in the slightest degree towards the room, but she raised just for one second the corner of her eyebrow and the curve of her shoulder, and then relapsed into her former gloomy quiescence. She recalled to me in that moment the figure of the slave-girl in Lewis's "Interior of the Harem;" it was the same gesture and the same expression—powerless, petulant disdain, with something half savage in it, like the glance of an untamed creature of the forests. I did not feel encouraged at the prospect before me, yet, strange to say, I felt less inclined to abandon it than I had felt before I saw her.

The younger sister was evidently embarrassed, and began feebly trying to make a little conversation.

"You have seen papa?" she said, inquiringly.

"Yes, and I am going to him again. I will not in-

trude upon you. I am so sorry that Miss Langley has a headache."

A momentary fire-flash from the huge dark eyes, but not the slightest movement or response.

The other seemed afraid of the subject, and gave me quite an imploring look as she changed it.

"It is rather hot in this room. Was it warm as you came here?"

There was something utterly hopeless in the attempt to make up a conversation out of such materials, and carry it on under such circumstances. The silent splendid gloom in the background was too much for me. Two or three questions were in my thoughts. Should I go without taking the slightest notice of Miss Langley? Should I say something to her sister, referring to her either directly or indirectly, and showing that I felt her behaviour? Should I address her at once? What was the best mode of treatment—what would be the wisest beginning! A doubtful future was before me, and the first step was important. So anxiously did these ideas contend in my mind, that I felt I was giving scant attention to the poor little girl who was trying to be so civil to me. But I thought I should atone for this by the relief of my departure.

"Good-bye," said I, taking the hand which she immediately stretched out to me. "Thank you for meeting me so kindly. I hope I shall see you again."

"Oh, I hope so," answered she, hurriedly and gently, and with an uneasy glance towards the window, as if she wondered whether now, at the last moment, any notice would be taken of my presence.

Not a movement nor a sound. Not the slightest deepening of that faint scarlet on the cheek; not the least quiver of those fixed inexplicable eyes. I had reached the door, but I turned with a sudden resolution, and walked straight up to the mystery as if it had been a ghost which one bold touch would dissolve into air.

"I mean to be your friend if I can," said I, taking almost forcibly the passive hand which lay upon the book. And without waiting for a moment to see the effect of my sudden stroke, I dropped the hand which I had taken—it was burning hot—and walked out of the room. I saw the younger girl standing with clasped hands, and the expression of genuine terror, as I passed.

Outside the door I stood still for a moment and collected myself, and considered the little scene which had just occurred before I went back to Mr. Langley. How had Maude looked during that moment of time in which I startled her by my proffer of friendship? I could hardly tell. There had been a slight movement of the marble, certainly. But, so far as I could analyse the rapid impression produced upon me, it was rather anger than surprise. Certainly, there was no response to the pressure of my hand; I even thought that she had been in the act of snatching away her own when I dropped it. "Well," said I to myself, "I must expect no better at first. My first business is to familiarise her with the idea that I mean to befriend her if she will let me. She rejects it now; gradually she will get accustomed to it; she will end by admitting it. Not till I am actually forced will I substitute mere constraint for influence; and, if I am forced, she shall be

compelled to acknowledge that it is her own work. But what is there in that face? What does it tell me! Not a tale of hopeless corruption, surely! There must be—there is—capacity for improvement. The very vehemence of the wrong shows a power of being right if I only can call it into action."

I roused myself with an effort, and went back to the drawing-room. Mr. Langley was walking slowly up and down the room. He paused, and faced me as I entered. "Well?" said he, anxiously.

"I have *not* been favourably received," answered I; "but I am come back determined to say Yes."

He grasped my hand. "You relieve me more than I can tell you," was his reply.

"Do not be too sure of me," I continued. "I may fail. But I am at least determined to make a fair attempt."

He stood looking thoughtfully on the ground. He did not ask me for any particulars of my interview. Probably he could divine, without any narrative from me, what its nature had been.

"There are two or three points which we must discuss at once," said he, after a pause. "In the first place, how soon can you come to us?"

"How soon do you want me?"

"The want is immediate; but I don't wish to be unreasonable. Shall we say a week?"

"I will be ready on this day week."

"You are all promptness and decision. Thank you heartily. You must take an early breakfast, and be pre-

pared for your journey by half-past eight. I will call for you, and we shall catch the nine o'clock train."

"Where am I going?" asked I, quietly.

"To a house of mine in North Wales—a shooting-box, but with everything comfortable about it on a small scale. I hope you care for pretty scenery; by the bye, what a stupid question to put to an artist!"

"I delight in the country," said I; "and I have been for the last two years in London, till I have almost forgotten what hills and streams are like. So there is at once a pleasure to balance the disagreeables of my position."

"I am very glad of it," answered he, seriously; "but it is the only one. There are no neighbours at Parc Rhaiader. The only other house in the valley is unoccupied; the few cottagers within reach speak nothing but Welsh. I shall subscribe to Mudie's for you, and the arrival of the book-box will be your only event,—except, of course, the post-hour. There is a fair piano, and I will see that there is a good stock of drawing materials. I can promise you nothing else."

"Do not think that my courage is likely to fail," said I. "I do not dislike solitude, and I am not afraid of difficulties; but I *am* afraid of failure, and I tell you candidly beforehand, that if I come to the conclusion that I am incapable of doing any good, I shall give up."

"You ought not to come to that conclusion in less than the two years of our agreement," was his answer.

I looked as I felt—somewhat startled. He went on, very gently, but with great decision of manner. "Let us

understand each other thoroughly. Reformation is a slow process; its beginnings are often quite imperceptible; its progress capricious; its symptoms uncertain. We must not, if you please, ground our agreement upon anything so intangible. What I want for my daughter is care, restraint, companionship. These can be supplied with or without the yet more desirable object, which neither you nor I can bespeak—the softening of her character. I believe and hope that, if you persevere, that too will be achieved,—though, perhaps, you may not see the fruit of your labours. Let us make our bargain for that which is within our power."

"You mean that you wish to bind me for two years under all circumstances?"

"As I bind myself. Two years are, after all, but a short time."

I reflected. What he had said was undeniably true, yet I shrank from parting with my liberty even upon fixed conditions of so advantageous a kind.

"Take your time," said he kindly. "I urge you to nothing. But if you return home without making your decision, I must suggest, what no doubt has occurred spontaneously to your own mind, that the peculiarities of the situation are matters of strict confidence."

"Of course," said I; "that could not be otherwise. It is a hard thing that you have to say as much as you have already said to a stranger, and as a matter of business."

"True," he replied; "it *is* a hard thing; and I would not willingly go through it again."

"It shall not be necessary: I accept your terms."

"It only remains, then, for us both to sign the form which I have ready prepared, and which I will fill up at once." He opened the drawer of a table as he spoke, and took out a written paper, to which he rapidly added some words in blank spaces left for the purpose. He then handed it to me, and rang the bell.

"Send Irvine here, and ask Mr. Wardour to come to me for a moment."

The paper was an agreement, drawn up in regular legal phrase, the parties to which were Jane Derwent and Everard Langley. I bound myself to hold for two years the office of governess or lady-companion in Mr. Langley's family, with one month's leave of absence in each year, and such further vacation as might be determined on by the contracting parties for their mutual convenience. He, on his part, bound himself to pay me the sum of four hundred pounds, in four instalments, at intervals of six months. If I abandoned the office of my own free will before the expiration of the two years, I forfeited that part of my salary which might remain unpaid at the time of such abandonment. But if I was dismissed by Mr. Langley for any cause whatever, it was stipulated that he should pay me the remainder of my salary at the time of my dismissal. The place of my residence during the two years was to be determined by Mr. Langley.

Clear and straightforward, and undoubtedly to my advantage. I could not help saying so when I had read it.

"That is as I intended it to be, and as it ought to be," observed he, with a smile.

IV.—INTRODUCTIONS AND INDICATIONS.

By the time that I had finished reading this document, Mr. Wardour and "Irvine" were waiting to witness it. Mr. Langley introduced them in form. Mr. Wardour was, I guessed, the family lawyer: a spare, dry man, of middle age, with laboriously bland manners, which seemed like a perpetual apology for the unattractiveness of his appearance. Irvine, the lady's-maid, "who had been unavoidably admitted into our confidence," was, of course, a mass of affectation: I never knew a lady's-maid worth her tea and sugar who was not. It is the form which a little more than the average of education and refinement assumes in that class of female, and it is understood by those naturalists who have studied the habits of the animal to be indicative rather of good than of evil.

She swam into the room with a fixed simper upon her face, which, could it have been photographed, would have suggested to unprejudiced observers the idea of absolute idiocy. Her hands were held out before her in a manner peculiar to ladies'-maids,—the wrists strongly curved, the fingers pendent and sprawling; the expression attempted seems to be that of utter helplessness and uselessness. She made a bow at me as if my first look had sprained her back. She uttered a prolonged groan, of indescribable elegance, as a sort of Amen to Mr. Langley's presentation speech.

"This is the person who will attend on you and Miss Langley, and whom I mentioned to you. We can entirely rely upon her."

"I hope we shall be good friends," said I, with a little nod. I am sure that she was appalled at my presumption, and I would lay a wager that she described me in the servants' hall as "tolerably lady-like, for a governess."

Two copies of the bond were duly signed and witnessed, and one was given to me to keep. Mr. Wardour observed that he would "lock the other up in his safe," at which Irvine gave a little shudder, evidently fearing that it might come out again somewhat greasy from having been kept among the cold meat.

"And now," said Mr. Langley, "let us go to luncheon. Pray do not say you are in a hurry, Miss Derwent. I want particularly to introduce you to Mrs. Langley; and really you must require a little refreshment after all this business."

He gave me his arm, and we went into the dining-room together, followed by Mr. Wardour. It had occurred to me before that Mrs. Langley seemed to be wonderfully quiescent in the whole of this business, but I accounted for it by supposing that it was too painful for her to appear or take any part. But I have always had a very high notion of a mother's powers and duties, and I thought it would have been well to refer to her a little more definitely. Her name had only been once mentioned—"great ain and trouble to Mrs. Langley and myself" were the words.

I was not prepossessed by Mrs. Langley. She was very much younger than her husband—she looked too young to be the mother of Maude. She was *petite*, with regular features and fair hair, like her second daughter. The ex-

pression of her face was fretful and anxious: it betokened ill-temper or ill-health, and I was inclined to suspect the former. Her manners were too hurried and conscious to be good; they did not set you at your ease. I immediately guessed that she was born in a social grade below her husband's, and that she was always trying to make up for her misfortune. Her dress was perfect; I wished Emma could have seen it—it would assuredly have been a "joy for ever" to her. Yet even here my carping eyes found something to object to. There was a trace of toil and care—I cannot say how or in what—pervading her whole appearance. There was no spontaneousness about it. It is not given to every woman to look as if she was born in fine clothes; but where that gift is not, it is better to resign the finery. There are obtrusive silks, which look as if the wearer had been put into them, and which rustle their dissatisfaction a mile off; there are bonnets which always look as if they belonged to somebody else, and were being tried on for an experiment; there are bracelets which seem never to lose the shop ticket: all these things should be eschewed.

I glanced round the room as I entered, but was not surprised that Maude was absent. It did not seem possible to conceive of her, in her present state, as making one of a family party. But as I mentally sketched Mrs. Langley's character to myself, I began to think that all the fault was not, perhaps, on my future pupil's side; that there might be some excuse; that there might have been some mismanagement. This idea encouraged me, and I secretly resolved to begin by trying extreme gentleness and kind-

ness. Bertha Langley, the second girl, was of our party, and we sat down to table. The conversation was curious; I noted it down at the time, and am glad that I did so, as I have now particular reasons for wishing to remember it.

It was in the early days of the table-turning mania, before Faraday's crucial experiment had satisfied all sane minds on the subject. Do not let it be supposed that I am going to lead up gradually to the history of some unexplained manifestation of preternatural energy. I have never in my life encountered anything of the kind. I do not profess to mark the limits of the possible; but, as far as my actual experience goes, I have never heard of any supposed "spiritual" performance which approached in marvellousness to the feats of a second-rate conjuror. The unexpected credulities which the movement has developed in quarters where a moderate amount of common sense and sound reasoning might have been looked for, are to me by far the strangest part of it.

Mrs. Langley had been assisting at a *séance* within the last few days, and Mr. Wardour was questioning her about it, with sarcasm so tender that it would not have hurt an undergraduate.

"And you actually saw the table go round?"

"I actually felt it. A great heavy table; it spun under our fingers; we could not have moved it if we had tried."

"Did you try?"

"No; but I am sure we could not. It stands to reason. A great heavy table like that!"

"And the spirits answered your questions?"

"They told my name. It was so curious. You know my name is Anne; and when they had got so far as A double N, I wondered so whether they would make the next letter A instead of E. I tried to take them in. I quite stopped on the A, and looked as if it was the real letter; but they knew better, and would not make a sign till I got to E."

"It seems these spirits can spell, which is a credit to them. I have heard of one who was fairly baffled by the name of Goethe. He did not know what to make of the diphthong."

"That was because he did not know German," said Mrs. Langley, quickly. "People are so unreasonable; they expect so much. They forget that the spirits are just like ourselves, and do everything just as we do. If a spirit died without learning German, how was he to find time for it afterwards?"

The quickness with which Mr. Langley here interposed seemed to show that he was in the habit of noticing and covering his wife's little absurdities.

"The whole thing is too recent to be fairly reasoned about as yet," said he. "We want a larger induction. But I never can understand why persons who are not professed sceptics should see any antecedent improbability in spirit manifestations."

"The antecedent improbability is simply historical," said Mr. Wardour. "All previous experience shows that the evidence of these stories breaks down, as evidence, whenever it is strictly tested; therefore, we distrust every new story of the kind."

"But the oddest thing to me," observed I, a little incautiously, "is, that professed sceptics are precisely the people who do *not* see any improbability in spirit manifestations. Almost all the unquestioning believers in such stories whom *I* have met with—"

"Take care!" interrupted Mr. Langley, holding up his finger; "Mrs. Langley is an unquestioning believer."

"I don't know what you mean," said Mrs. Langley, sharply.

"I mean that you believe in the spirits who answer when you rap for them."

"Of course I do; but that was not what you said."

She was evidently affronted, but he shielded her again, and changed the subject; Mr. Wardour playing into his hands with a perfect understanding that the lady was not quite easy to deal with. My secret suspicions were confirmed, and the confirmation was strengthened by Mrs. Langley's apparent sulkiness during the rest of luncheon. She never quite recovered from the shock of having been publicly called an unquestioning believer.

I tried a few experiments upon Bertha. I wanted to test, as far as I could, all the constituents of the soil which seemed to have disagreed so fatally with the plant now entrusted to my care. Bertha was one of those pretty caressing creatures who win upon you by the mere influence of manner without impressing you with any very definite notion as to the character underlying the manner. She spoke to you as if her happiness entirely depended on your approval; she was profuse in superlatives, but seemed ready to abandon her most cherished convictions at a ges-

ture of dissent from anybody else; she was never quite happy unless she was sitting hand-in-hand with somebody. Everything in her was so undeveloped, that there might be some lurking mischief to come out hereafter; her mother's girlhood might have resembled hers; but at present she gave fair promise of becoming eventually a comfortable pillow enough for some man's mind. There was something mirror-like about her: when she presented you with the image of an opinion you involuntarily looked somewhere else for the origin of it: her most emphatic "I think" only suggested to you the question, "Now, who has put that into her head?"

Long before I took my leave she had begun to call me "dear," and had made me tell her the names and ages of my family at home. I felt obliged to the little soft thing for her evident wish to "make it pleasant" to me, and I did not in the least repulse her attentions. On the contrary, I was inclined to pat her pretty cheeks and be kind to her. I thought she was, perhaps, not very unlike Emma in temperament; though it would require the same stern test of adversity as that to which Emma had been subjected to give dignity to her gentleness and her warmth, by proving the depth of their reality.

For one of her little demonstrations I was particularly grateful. Before we parted, she showed me a photograph —a group of portraits of her whole family party. The likenesses were good, and the composition tolerable. She was charmed with my approbation, and to my surprise, insisted on making me a present of it.

"Oh, *do* let me give it you—now, please—you must,

really. I do so like giving it to you. I have several duplicates, so you need not in the least mind taking it. I want you to show it to your people at home, and hear what they say about us all. It will be such fun. Besides, I am sure they will be so much more comfortable about you when they have seen the kind of people you are going to be with. They will feel as if they knew us, and as if you were not going to quite strangers; and that will be so nice. There it is for you!" (she had been wrapping it in paper while she spoke). "Good-bye, dear; I am so glad you are coming to us, and I hope I shall see you again. Good-bye."

With a squeeze of the hand, she left me to exchange somewhat less tender farewells with the rest of the party. Mr. Langley followed me to the head of the stairs.

"I had one question to ask you," said I: "how much do you wish me to say in explanation of the 'peculiar circumstances' which you remember that you mentioned in your letter, and about which, of course, I must expect to be questioned a little? Shall I say simply that they have been explained to me in confidence, but that I must not repeat what I have been told?"

He mused for a moment. "That would do," replied he; "and yet it might give rise to conjectures of the very same kind as those which occurred to your own mind, and which I am so anxious to prevent. I think it will be better to say—what is strictly true—that your pupil's temper is difficult, and that, owing to circumstances which you are not at liberty to communicate, her education has been entirely neglected; that it is thought better that the

deficiencies should be supplied at a distance from her family; and that you are therefore to have the sole charge of her and her establishment for a little while. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"What made you think," said he, as we shook hands, "that I was an invalid?"

I smiled. "Oh," answered I, apologetically, "I am a great jumper at conclusions, and I fancied I saw something in your expression as if you had been subject to pain."

"You were right enough," said he, laughing. "I have been a martyr to toothache—nothing worse. But, you know, there is no pain more excruciating."

It was a little odd that his laugh exhibited a firm and perfect set of white, regular teeth, unmistakably his own. But I did not carry my freedom so far as to express the slight feeling of wonder which flitted through my mind as I went downstairs.

V.—HONEST CRITICISM.

"That," said I, "is Mrs. Langley."

"She must have been a very pretty woman," observed Emma, "to look as well as that in a photograph."

"Humph!" said my father, "photographs of insipid faces are generally flattering. I can easily imagine, however, that *this* lady would not be able to control a daughter with a difficult temper. She looks a little fretful, perhaps, as if she had seen some trouble; but she has evidently no will of her own. One of the class of women who are born to be either pets or victims; and I should think she has been the latter—eh, Jane?"

"That is not the impression she made upon me," answered I. "I think her humoursome, and am very glad she is not to be my mistress."

"Humoursome, with that sheep-face and no chin!" cried my father. "Never was such a thing heard of. No, no; rely upon it, she has been a consistent victim ever since she could run alone. I have very little doubt that she has been habitually punished for somebody else's faults all her life long. Poor woman! And she thought she should gain freedom and independence by being married; and she chose Mr. Langley. Poor woman!"

"Of course you don't like Mr. Langley's looks," said I, tartly.

"And why 'of course,' unless there is a self-evident reason for it? No—I *don't* like his looks. Plenty of head, I admit, but very little heart; plenty of will—just look at that chin! It would be only charity to the rest of the world to put a beard on it! No woman could be comfortable under the presidency of such a chin as that, especially when you look at it in conjunction with the eyebrows. What *could* have made you take such a fancy to this man, Jane?"

"I have *not* taken a fancy to him," replied I. "I have seen him, and you have not, and I have used my judgment in making a guess at his character from his countenance and manners—that's all."

"You couldn't judge on worse grounds. Depend upon it, this man's countenance and manner are no index to his character. The photograph betrays him."

"The photograph!" exclaimed I. "Why, nothing is

better known than that photographs disfigure the expression of the finest faces."

"How do they do that?" asked my father, mildly.

"Do what?"

"Disfigure an expression. I don't know how it is done, and I should like to see the process."

"You tiresome old man!" cried I, taking him by the shoulders, and shaking him; "you know what I mean. They change the expression for the worse."

"I don't think they do anything of the kind. Change the expression!—why, they simply fix it; they often tell secrets. They reveal what you did not know to be in the face; but when once you have seen it in the photograph, you can find it out in the face—more's the pity! We don't like to see ourselves as we really are, and that is why we don't like our own photographs."

"But they do *not* show us what we really are," I persisted; "the real idea you get of a face is made up of the successive expressions of a great number of moments. The photograph fixes *one*—the whole question is, whether it has fixed a bad or a good one. It certainly generally fixes a bad one."

"It has fixed a bad one here, I admit," said my father, provokingly, as he studied Mr. Langley's portrait. "I can fancy that it has developed a latent expression which common observers might not detect in the original; but you may safely take it for the expression of the real character."

"He must be as ugly as his wife is handsome," observed Emma.

"Not ugly," said my father. "All the points of the face are good—the proportions unusually fine; if the colouring is tolerable, he must be a handsome man."

"Oh, I dare say he may have handsome features," replied Emma; "but it is such a disagreeable expression."

"Nay," said my father, "the expression is attractive—full of power; but I don't think it is reliable."

"Such an insincere face!" cried Emma.

"Hardly insincere," said my father. "The extreme determination gives it a kind of honesty, and there is not blandness enough to constitute insincerity."

"So ill-tempered-looking," continued Emma. "Oh, Jane, I wish you would give it up! I am sure you will never be happy under that man's authority. It's not worth three times two-hundred a year if you are to be made miserable."

"My dear Emma, how can you be so childish?" interposed my father. "Pray don't make Jane nervous without reason. There is nothing threatening in this face except what comes from the exaggeration of light and shadow, inseparable from a sun picture, and the contraction of features which hardly any man can help assuming when he knows he is being 'taken.' You might as well complain of a man in a dentist's chair because he doesn't look pleasant."

I artfully kept silence. I really did not want my father to settle down into permanent opposition to Mr. Langley, and now that Emma had made it appear what line she intended to take, I knew that I was safe in leaving him to be acted upon by her gentle repulsion. Emma was glad

enough to be contradicted, for she wished to be hopeful; but was honestly frightened by my father's theories of physiognomy. Presently she observed—"Is that the son looking over Mrs. Langley's shoulder? I think he has a very pleasant face."

"Yes," said I, "that is the only son. He is abroad; I don't exactly know where."

"He is like both parents, and like the pretty sister too," said my father. "Curious, how the family points come out in the two young faces. But, Jane—your pupil! there is not a particle of the Langley about her. It's a grand face, but quite of a different type. I'll lay you a wager she's not their daughter."

"How *can* you talk in such a manner?" cried I.

"How can I help it?" retorted he. "Why, only look at her: she is like an eaglet in a group of barn-door fowls; can any one in his senses believe that she comes of the same stock? It's all very well to talk, but you shall never persuade me that she has anything to do with them. There's a mystery somewhere, take my word for it; and it ought to be your business to find it out. I wonder whether you would be justified in opening Mr. Langley's letters; I almost think you would."

Emma began to laugh. "We had better let him alone," cried she; "when he is in this humour we shall get no good out of him. Let us take to something practical. If you don't have your gown tried on *this* morning, Jane, I shall certainly not be able to finish it before you go. This is the third time I have asked you, and you always evade me. *Do* come, now.'

I went; and Emma said, as we left the room, "Thank you, papa. If you had not worried her so that she was glad to escape, I should never have got possession of her."

Up to the very hour of my departure we maintained our usual friendly habits of sparring. I sometimes wonder if any situation of affairs could be found so solemn or so pathetic as to induce us to intermit them. I think not. I am sure if my father were ever to abstain from contradicting any opinion expressed by me I should think he was dying. Our talk was very useful in keeping down our sentiments. I do not know what would have become of me without it. I cared a great deal more than I had expected for leaving home. I had a hundred secret misgivings about the comfort of the two I left behind, which I suppressed with a strong hand as often as they obtruded themselves. I would not allow myself to indulge in the vanity of supposing that I was really indispensable to them. Emma was far more amiable and considerate than I, and I checked myself as often as I felt tempted to give her any little parting hints about my father.

"You must write *very* often," said Emma, as we sat at breakfast on the last morning,"

"No—don't!" cried my father, with a kind of sigh which brought a veil over my eyes. "It will only make us discontented. Keep a diary, Jane, and send it to us at moderate intervals."

"You can do that too, and that will be very nice," said Emma; "only you must write very often besides, or else we shall think something is the matter."

"That would be contrary to all our principles," observed

I. "I can't agree to that. Whenever I do *not* write you must be sure that all is well. I promise you a letter when anything is amiss."

"Promise nothing," said my father. "There isn't a more ridiculous or troublesome form of affection going (and that's saying a good deal) than the particular form which makes a tax and a fetter out of one's correspondence. The next thing Emma will propose is, that you should have fixed days for writing; and I warn you that if you attempt anything of the sort, I'll strike work and go into a monastery immediately. Do let us have confidence enough in each other to believe that nothing really important will be left untold, and to allow for the little variations of mood, health, or occupation, which may make it quite a boon not to be compelled to feel that you *must* write, under all circumstances, if you would escape reproach."

"Don't look so dejected, Emma. I'll remember your weakness, and write to you sometimes, even if I don't feel inclined."

"Always write such letters in red ink, if you please," said my father, "and then I shall know them at first sight, and shall not be beguiled into reading them on false pretences."

I rose from my seat while he was speaking, for I was aware of that well-known pause of carriage-wheels at the door which so often makes the hearts within the house beat double-quick time, or stand still for a moment. Our brief farewells were soon exchanged, and I was already in the passage when I heard Mr. Langley's voice, and found that he was politely coming in to be introduced to my

father. I confess that I felt proud of his superiority to his photograph during the little interview which ensued. Nothing could be more graceful or winning than the easy cordiality of his manner. I could scarcely doubt that my father was conquered; and I was glad, too, that it should be known at the outset that my father was himself a thorough gentleman. It is true that he could not help questioning the accuracy of Mr. Langley's estimate of the number of minutes required for reaching the railway-station. He also doubted the fact of our arriving at our journey's end as soon as we expected; drew Mr. Langley's attention to a junction station, where he promised him that he would miss his train; and having ascertained that he did *not* intend to sleep on the road, strongly recommended him to do so. However, these were trifles, and I believe that they passed unnoticed.

It was rather a relief to me not to find Maude in the carriage. Mr. Langley explained that she and Irvine would meet us at the station. I had, therefore, a short reprieve, and was able to hesitate a little longer as to the best manner of greeting her. As we went my companion spoke cheerfully and pleasantly of general matters. He evidently did not wish to dwell more than was actually necessary upon the disagreeables or difficulties of my position, and I gladly adopted his tone. I felt encouraged by it, and began to hope that I had seen my charge under exceptional disadvantages. If it should prove possible to ignore her peculiarities for a little while, and to assume that she was like other young ladies, unless she obtruded the difference upon my attention, it might be much easier to

deal with her. She might possibly be ashamed of disappointing me or taking me by surprise; and finding that good behaviour was expected from her as a matter of course, she might feel herself under a kind of obligation to behave well. With such hopes I flattered myself till we reached the station; but the first moment after my arrival undeceived me.

VI.—THE CAMPAIGN OPENS.

We found Maude at the station; she had not left the carriage in which she drove there. She was sitting far back, and she wore a sheltering hat and close veil, so that I could not see her face. At one door of the carriage stood Irvine, complete in almost superhuman elegance; at the other was the man-servant: they had somewhat unpleasantly the effect of sentries guarding a prisoner. From the female sentry Mr. Langley received a whispered report in passing, which seemed to disturb him not a little. He stood irresolute, and muttered the word "unlucky!" to himself; but after a short hesitation he sent the man to get tickets, opened the carriage door, and invited the occupant to descend. She did not stir. He mounted on the step, and, putting in his head, began to speak to her in persuasive tones; then suddenly came back with an air of dismay, and said, "She is not very well; I think she is a little faint; Irvine, come to Miss Langley."

We helped her out of the carriage, and supported her to a bench on the platform; she really seemed unable to stand. I removed her veil, and the air upon her face revived her. She *gave two or three* deep sighs, and then

sat up; Mr. Langley held a glass of water to her lips, and she swallowed a little, half unconsciously. "We had better take our places at once," said he to me, in a low troubled voice; "we shall gain nothing by delaying, and perhaps the movement will do her good."

"Is she able?" answered I, in the same tone.

He looked at her very anxiously, and then whispered, "I think so. It is only a passing indisposition, and there was a reason for it, as I will explain to you by-and-by. *Anything* is better than to allow her to remain."

I could but acquiesce; and Maude, who, though partly recovered, was quite passive in our hands, allowed herself to be conducted to her place in the train. She looked doubtfully from side to side, but not till the train began to move did the full sense of her position seem to break upon her; then she half sprang up, as if with some sudden desperate thought of escape, sank back again, buried her face in her handkerchief, and began to weep bitterly.

"Poor child!" said Mr. Langley. "It will do her good. Let us leave her to Irvine for a little while."

He drew me into the other compartment of the carriage as he spoke, and while Irvine busied herself about her young mistress with restoratives, he pointed out to me from the window a man standing on the platform, and looking eagerly after the train, which was only now beginning to get up its speed.

"I told you that there had been a recent *affaire de cœur*," said he, with a melancholy smile; "there stands the hero of it. He followed this poor child to the station —whether by her appointment or not, it would be vain to

inquire. Irvine prevented any conversation; but anger, shame, and agitation were altogether too much for Maude, and her nerves were entirely upset in the way you saw."

I looked with some curiosity at the man thus pointed out to me. I know no single word that describes his appearance so well as the objectionable word "*slang*." He was slang from the over-trimmed beard down to the conspicuous boots; every part of him seemed to thrust itself obtrusively on your notice. He was looking eagerly and fixedly, with a half smile, into the last carriage of the train as it slowly passed before him, and I could have sworn, from the steady impudence of his eyes, that he was trying to put some young girl out of countenance. My face expressed my disgust, and perhaps my surprise also, that a girl in Maude's position should have had the opportunity of forming such an acquaintance.

"I don't admire Miss Langley's taste, certainly," said ; "what is he?"

"A pianoforte-tuner," was the answer, in a tone sufficiently expressive.

I opened my eyes wide, and then could not help expressing my satisfaction that we were going into absolute seclusion.

"Yes," said Mr. Langley, "it is the only plan. Other thoughts, other interests, will open upon her by degrees. Her abilities are excellent, and I expect a great change to take place when she is fairly compelled to cultivate them by the absence of all external objects of interest. She is still half a child; in a year I hope she will look back on all this nonsense with shame and dismay. It is the rest-

less desire of admiration and of liberty which renders it impossible to deal with her in an ordinary home. Her perfect ignorance of the world, and a fearlessness which, though it belongs to her temperament, is of course increased by her ignorance, would get her into perpetual scrapes if she remained with us. I believe the poor child thought that fellow was some great musical genius in disguise, and that he would be the blessed means of emancipating her from control."

"What shall I do," asked I, "if, in spite of all precautions and improbabilities, any difficulty of this kind should arise when she and I are alone at Parc Rhaiader?"

"Send a man and horse to the nearest station (it is ten miles off) to telegraph for me," was the reply; "and in the meantime watch her night and day, and let the whole household help you."

"But the servants," said I, hesitatingly; "does any one, except Irvine—?"

I could not be surprised at his look of embarrassment; it was only the reflection of my own feeling.

"They are old servants," answered he; "and though, of course, we have been as reserved as possible in our communications, they know quite enough to be on their guard at a hint. I assure you, Miss Derwent, servants in general know far more of our most private affairs than we like to suppose. When we are sure of faithfulness and honesty, it seems unnecessary to wear a mask which does not deceive them for a moment. I would rather invite their co-operation—in its due place, of course—but recognising them as members of my family."

I did not know what to say to this; but the idea was disagreeable to me, and I could not help thinking that laying aside the mask did involve a real, and not only an apparent, change. At least, the act must give a seal and a shape to what before was only variable gossip; at least, it must open the way to discussions and consultations, which could hardly remain confined within the limits prescribed to them at the outset. Moreover, there was something in it which annoyed me in a way which I could only express to myself by saying that it was a shock to my instincts. Nevertheless, I felt that there was much to be said on the other side. I could imagine that servants who would chatter about secrets the nature of which they only guessed might be more scrupulous if they felt that they had received a confidence. The policy of the plan might be wise; the actual details of it could hardly fail to be distasteful.

I was not sanguine about the business before me. It is not my nature to be sanguine about anything—least of all about reformations. My tendency is certainly to think that the majority of apparent reformations are only apparent. I do not wish to adopt this view, but I find it forcing itself upon me. In a lower rank of society, and where offences commonly take the form of breaches of the law, I am well content that reformatories and asylums should be multiplied; but it is rather because I think there is nothing else to be done than because I expect any real good from them. In a minority of cases they may produce a moderate outside orderliness of behaviour for the future; I cannot say that I hope for much more from

them. The same despondency besets me as to the faults of my own class after the age of childhood is fairly passed. I struggle in vain against a secret fatalism which is always suggesting to me that as the character begins so it goes on, and that the utmost which can be done for it is to prevent exposure, and keep the evil within decent limits. When people talk to me about the impressibility of youth—about sympathy and confidence being the main requisites—about the impossibility that a young offender should be irreclaimable,—I do not deny their statements, but I mentally limit them. I cannot help saying to myself, "Yes; some young minds are impressible—some young hearts are to be won by sympathy and confidence—some young culprits are to be reclaimed. And some are *not*. You can't alter —you have only to find out. And if you happen to have got hold of the hard, defiant, unimpressible specimens, I am sorry for you. You must not, of course, leave off working; but your work will be in vain, except in so far as the fulfilment of a duty can never be in vain as regards the fulfiller of it." So I was going to my work now rather with the idea of trying to "find out" than of trying to reclaim. And I had already found out a good deal more than I liked.

The journey was sombre. When Maude recovered from her agitation, she settled into silence. It might be sulkiness—it might be simple depression. Whichever it was, it was not cheering. Mr. Langley read his newspaper, and I betook myself to my railway novel. Evening was beginning to close when we reached the last station, and we had ten miles of rough country roads to

traverse. A horse was waiting for Mr. Langley, a pony-chaise for Maude and me; Irvine, with a mute protest in every fibre of her frame, condescended to go with the luggage in a spring-cart. We were some little time arranging ourselves. When we were fairly off, Mr. Langley rode on before, and the cart followed far behind, so that Maude and I were actually *tête-à-tête*. The rosy old man who drove us, and who had "factotum" written in every line of his quaint pleasant face, turned occasionally to give me a lesson in the geography of our way. I have a strong love for new places, and I like to fit them with their names as soon as possible. Doubtless, therefore, I satisfied him by my intelligent interest, for he twisted himself round so frequently, and touched his hat so pertinaciously, that I did not feel quite easy as to the progress of the pony over roads which were only sketched, and that, too, in what drawing-masters call "the bad bold style." We had a hill to mount, at least a mile and a half long, and very steep; then we went down a series of rugged descents, and emerged upon a bare heath, the far skirts of which were already looking like dark purple sweeps of a brush against a breadth of wan, yellow sky. Then we turned an angle, and got a glimpse of a grave company of shadowy hills, which seemed trying to pass themselves off for mountains in the twilight, and were by no means bad representatives of their mightier brethren; and then we entered the valley or glen of Rhaiader. The rest of our way lay along a rough precipitous road, varying constantly in its height above the rapid stream which formed the bottom of the valley; sometimes quite on the edge of the

water—sometimes scaling a cliff of grey stone, or a heap of rocks, grass, and heath, intermixed, and crested here and there with a dwarf oak-tree. The hills above us, and on the opposite side of the stream, were finely formed, and some of them wooded. Nothing could be prettier than the way in which their soft sloping lines overlapped each other at the base, and seemed to bar all onward progress; opening as we advanced, to show a new curve of shining water, and a new rampart of irregular heights. There was very little cultivation; it was downright, genuine wild country—almost intoxicating to the thirsty soul of a Londoner. Even to my gloomy companion, I could not help expressing my admiration and pleasure; they would not be kept down. She answered me more politely than I expected.

"Yes; everybody thinks it very pretty."

"Do you know the place well?"

"I was here once before. I like it much better than London. I mean to stay here always."

I was a little surprised, and hardly knew how to answer this suddenly expressed determination. After a pause, I said, in the friendliest manner I could assume, "I hope we shall have a great many walks together."

She turned her head away. "No," replied she, in a short dry manner; "unless I can walk out by myself, I shall stay at home."

Just then we slackened our pace as we began a steep ascent, and we were startled by the sudden apparition of a human figure, the only one we had seen since we entered the valley.

It was a lad of fourteen or fifteen, who came bounding and scrambling up the face of the little precipice between the stream and the road, and called out, in a cheery ringing voice, as he leaped the hedge, and came towards us, "I say, old fellow, will you give us a lift to Clytha?"

Clytha was a tiny village, about half a mile further up the valley than Parc Rhaiader, Mr. Langley's house.

"There's a cart behind," answered Gwythyr, the factotum, with a slight backward movement of the handle of his driving-whip.

"I dare say there is," was the boy's reply, "and a wheelbarrow behind that; and perhaps, if I went a mile further, I might meet with a garden roller. Upon my word, you *are* a cool hand!"

There was that boundless impudence in his look and manner which is not uncommon in the male sex between the ages of twelve and sixteen, and which is generally a subject of peculiar amusement to quaint old rustics like Gwythyr, when it does not put them in a passion. He was a remarkably fine-looking lad, tall and strongly knit, with great brown eyes, and a profusion of black curly hair. He wore a light grey shooting costume, with black leather gaiters buttoned to the knees, a wallet on his back, and a little straw hat on his head, and looked altogether very picturesque.

"I should think you might manage to walk if the lady's-maid was to give you her arm," said Gwythyr provokingly.

"Well, that *might* tempt me to be sure," answered he, with an immeasurably saucy look at us; "but it's more

than *you* could do without crutches, my venerable friend, if you had walked thirty miles since daybreak, as I have. Now, I say, are you going to make a little room? Don't be frightened, there's a dear; I wouldn't hurt you for the world!"

He made a spring as he spoke, and alighted beside Gwythyr, who, half laughing, half angry, laid a determined hand on the breast of his jacket. "Get out of that, young fellow," said he, authoritatively; "this is coming it a little too strong."

"Let him stay, Gwythyr," said Maude; "he does us no harm."

The boy made her a profound bow, and then quietly seated himself beside the driving seat. "Ah! I knew they wanted me," said he, confidentially. "Pray make yourself comfortable now; don't be shy, there's a good fellow!"

Gwythyr screwed up his face into a laugh, and shook his sides. "I should think," retorted he, "you were pretty well acquainted with the symptoms of *that* disease."

"Nearly died of it when I was five years old, and have had no return of the complaint since; but it's in my constitution, so I am on my guard against the first symptoms. Are you bound for Clytha House?"

"No; for Parc Rhaiader."

"Whew!" whistled the boy. "I shall have a bit to walk still. Well, I really am uncommonly obliged to you for your hospitality. I saw you had it in you at the first glance. You're a regular beauty, you know, and if you were a Papist I'd canonise you as soon as look at you."

"You were in luck to meet with me," said Gwythyr; "if it had been my master, now, you wouldn't have got your lift quite so easily."

"Is he such a horrid ruffian? Ah! you look like a blameless sufferer. I don't mind it for you; you are a born martyr, and no mistake; and it wouldn't be fulfilling your destiny if you had an easy time of it. But I *am* sorry for the lady's-maids" (pointing, with a jerk of his thumb, back at us); "how many are there of them? And does Mr. Langley always travel with two?"

"Bless your impudence, you young scoundrel," chuckled Gwythyr, in high delight. "Lady's-maids, indeed!" And whispered some more accurate information about us, which appeared to take his companion by surprise.

The boy made a long face, and muttered, "Well, I *have* put my foot in it! Why the devil did you *say* they were lady's-maids, then, you treacherous old buffer?"

After this he lowered his voice, but by no means held his tongue for the rest of the way. Gwythyr's suppressed chuckle indicated intense appreciation of the discourse; and the bright, triumphant laugh of the boy rang out from time to time, making the air joyful with what some French writer prettily calls "*le bruit de sa jeunesse.*" I really wondered if it was like a glimpse of another world to my gloomy companion in the corner, and the contrast filled me with unspeakable pity, such as one might feel in looking at a condemned prisoner, even if absolutely certain of the justice of the sentence. The havoc of a young life, let it come from what cause it will, is always a spectacle for tears.

About a mile before we reached Parc Rhaiader our gay companion left us, saying that he should make a short cut to Clytha, by crossing the stream and going along the opposite bank. He came to the carriage-door, hat in hand, and offered apologies and thanks very gracefully, though still in a free-and-easy manner. He was evidently an original, and I could not make up my mind whether he was a gentleman born or not. There was a slight foreign accent in his English—at least, it was unlike any provincial accent that I ever heard; and there was also a little more gesticulation in his manner, and mobility in his face, than is quite common among English boys. If it had not been for this, and for an indescribable sort of *dash* about him, more conspicuous and *prononcé* than is quite consistent with our island habits even at his time of life, he might have passed for an Etonian, out for a lark, in a high state of health and audacity. While I speculated about him, I saw his light figure leap the stream—no small feat, even at its narrowest part—and go springing up the opposite bank and in among the shadows of Clytha woods, as if it had wings to its heels. We proceeded more laboriously, for we had fully half a mile of steep ascent to accomplish after we had passed the gate of Parc Rhaiader till we drew up on the platform in front of the house door. I could see, in the closing light, that the grounds were tolerably extensive, wooded, and very pretty; lying on a series of natural terraces, which extended from the edge of the stream to within a few hundred feet of the summit of the hill. One bold precipice of grey rock stood up from the woods, so close above the house that it seemed as though an ac-

tive man might have leaped from its lower edges upon the roof. As you approached, however, it became evident that the rock was too perpendicular to be safely descended, and the space between it and the house too wide to be conveniently leaped, even by so daring a cragsman as our young friend with the wallet and gaiters.

Mr. Langley was on the steps to welcome us, and he seemed highly pleased by my admiration of the scenery of my new home, and kindly anxious to make me feel that he wished me to be at home in it.

VII.—MOVE AND CHECK.

The real business of my life began when Mr. Langley was gone. He only stayed one night. Maude did not appear at the early breakfast before his departure; he and I were *tête-à-tête*. Nothing worthy of note passed between us; he reiterated some of his cautions and explanations, and I familiarized myself with my position while he talked to me. But he was evidently much depressed; so much that I could not help saying a word of consolation and encouragement, though it seemed almost an absurdity from me, because I had as yet nothing to base it upon. He smiled faintly, and gave me a warm shake of the hand.

"The best chance for your success is that you should begin hopefully," said he. He then left me, to wish his daughter good-bye, and returned after a few minutes, with an air of increased dejection. "God bless you!"—these were his parting words, spoken with great kindness—"keep up your heart; remember you are mistress in this

house, and if you have a wish or a want, be sure you let me know it without scruple."

I cannot express how sorry I felt for him. I watched his pale, melancholy profile, motionless, and with a painful void in his eyes, while the carriage was being packed; then I saw him mount, and he turned towards the window where I stood, waved his hand, and forced a smile as he took his seat. And I prepared for my work, with three chief resolutions separating themselves from the tangle of my thoughts. First, to be kind and sympathizing, rather than harsh, but to put as little apparent pity into the kindness of my manner as I could. Secondly, to be very unobtrusive, and to watch my opportunities, not making any set speech or announcement about our future life together, and not originating anything for a time, but simply waiting to see what Maude would do, and shaping my measures accordingly. Thirdly, not to allow myself to make any sort of theory about the object of my experiments for at least a month, but to act to the moment only, and collect evidence.

Waiting to see what Maude would do was weary work, for it appeared to be her resolution to do nothing. When she came into the room—the sonorous rustle of invisible skirts outside showing that she had been escorted to the very door—she placed herself at once in a large, deep easy-chair, settled herself into one of those indescribably undisciplined attitudes (I can't find a word for my meaning) which has a sort of defiance in every line of its languor; and so stayed, her hands clasped round her knee, her great brown eyes looking fixedly forward at nothing. I

established myself at the far end of the room, wrote, read, or worked through the morning, and took no notice of her. When dinner was announced, at two o'clock, she rose with a suddenness which seemed to me to indicate that she wanted to forestall any order or invitation, moved quickly into the other room, and took her seat without looking towards me. We dined in total silence, for she uttered no sound, and I steadily maintained my resolution of leaving her to take the initiative. In the afternoon, I rang the bell, and sent for Irvine.

"I am going out for an hour's walk," said I, very distinctly; "but I believe that Miss Langley intends to remain at home."

A pause. No answer. Not the slightest change of position; only a scarcely perceptible deepening of the rich tint on Maude's cheeks. Irvine made obeisance—her stately homage could not be called a curtsey; answered, "Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am," with a kind of desperate softness, which seemed to imply that she would rather suffer death than admit by her manner that there was anything in the state of the household inconsistent with perfect harmony and exquisite politeness; and I took my departure.

I determined to enjoy my hour of freedom to the utmost. I lost no unnecessary minute in preparation, but was on the banks of the stream as soon as possible. I followed a rough path leading up the valley towards Clytha, and passing under the peculiar crag which I have before described, which overtopped the house of Parc Rhaiader. There was one point at which this crag seemed to be accessible;

and, as I have a keen appetite for summits, and could see at a glance that the view from this particular summit must be exquisite, and that it would acquaint me at once with the whole geography of the valley, I resolved to attempt it. When I had ascended about a third of the height, however, I was obliged to give it up. With the help of a strong hand I might possibly have achieved the rest, but the holding-places for feet and hands were too small and too far apart for a solitary woman, and I resigned myself to my fate, and returned to the edge of the stream, not without encountering some difficulties in descending from the point which I had reached.

As I picked my way among fragments of rock and spaces of treacherous green turf, into which an incautious foot might sink over the ankle, I came suddenly upon a fisherman deeply engaged with his rod. He was busy with a pool, deeper than the rest of the stream, and lying at some distance below the pretty waterfall from which Parc Rhaiader took its name, and which I was now approaching. This cascade, broken into five or six little precipices of transparent brown water and creamy bursts of foam, was formed by the lowest spur of the crag which I had been vainly trying to climb. I could see, as I came near, that a person coming from the upper end of the valley, and mounting the crag from the ridge immediately above the falls, would have a much easier task than I had.

The fisherman came towards me, taking off his hat, and I recognized in a moment the young traveller who had so unceremoniously established himself on our driving seat on the previous evening.

"I was watching you," said he, and "just coming to the rescue, when I saw you turn back. It was uncommonly plucky, but there wasn't a chance for you."

"So I saw," replied I, looking at his frank, gay face, with an irresistible inclination to see more of it.

"Now look here," said he cordially; "if you want to get up on the top of that place, I'll show you the way. I've just finished my day's work, and I know every step of it."

It occurred to me that in my very peculiar position, I ought not to make an acquaintance of any sort, if I could help it. So I declined his offer—reluctantly, I confess.

"Oh, just as you like," cried he; "but you shall see how easy it is. Just you stand here and watch, and I'll be up in ten minutes."

He was packing up his gear while he spoke, and was off like a shot with the last words, giving me a friendly nod. I saw him mount the ridge above the falls, and then go up the steeper ascent at full speed, as if to convince me of its practicability, not stopping till he reached the summit. There he stood up, tall and black, against the bright afternoon sky, kissed his hand to me with a gesture of triumph, unslung his fishing-basket, and seemed to be busy for a minute or two making some rearrangement of its contents, which I did not understand; and then, to my dismay, began to descend the precipitous side of the cliff towards the house. He had left his rod and basket on the ground, and he proceeded with so much caution, that I could see that he had undertaken no easy task. I watched him breathlessly, wishing that my voice could reach him, dread-

ing every moment lest I should see some terrible catastrophe, yet quite unable to withdraw my eyes. He went down cautiously and skilfully, with occasional pauses and slight hesitating changes of route, which made my heart beat painfully fast, till he reached a ledge a little above the level of the roof. Here he stopped, clasped one arm tightly round some root or stem which grew out of the angle of the rock, stooped far forward, and, to my amazement, flung something which he held in his other hand, with admirable precision of aim, at the nearest garret window of the house. Having performed this feat, he drew himself lightly backward, and went round the cliff, following the ledge on which he had alighted, and disappearing from my view on the far side. I went back to the house as fast as I could, with the guilty feeling that I had permitted something which I ought to have prevented. I lost not a moment in going up to the garret in question, devoutly hoping that no one was there before me. It was an empty half-furnished room, evidently not in use; it was not ceiled, and there was a door in the sloping roof opening to the outside. The missile thrown by my audacious friend had encountered a closed window, and was lying on the stone parapet. I opened the window with some difficulty, and found, to my amusement, five fine trout carefully tied up in a red pocket-handkerchief.

Just a little bit of boyish gallantry, thought I; but how in the world am I to account for it to the servants? I can't go boldly into the kitchen and say I've caught them. And if I tell the truth about them, I know enough of the probabilities about servants in general when they are com-

menting upon governesses, and the certainty of their disposition to comment in such a very peculiar household as ours, to be sure that I shall expose myself to suspicion. I shall have the immaculate Irving writing to Mr. Langley, that she regrets to apprise him that she has reason to fear that Miss Derwent is not quite so cautious as desirable in the avoidance of unnecessary introductions. And though, perhaps, it is no more than might be naturally expected from her position, she could wish that, if it were not invidious, some additional barriers might be observed. Having amused myself by constructing this paragraph in what I felt sure was Irvine's characteristic style of letter-writing, I bethought myself that Gwythyr, not I, was responsible for my adventure. So I went bravely down into the yard, with the fish in my hand, determined to forestall any possible doubts of myself by a vigorous remonstrance. I thought I would say that Mr. Langley did not wish us to make any acquaintances while we were at Parc Rhaiader, and that I hoped Gwythyr would be very careful in future, for that the result of his good nature had been an attempt at acquaintance which, I was afraid, would annoy Mr. Langley not a little, In the yard I found symptoms apparent that Gwythyr had himself been engaged in fishing. His basket lay open on a stone slab outside one of the windows, and beside it two or three of his prey; he had evidently been called away while just preparing to weigh the fruit of his afternoon's sport. An impulse prompted me to get rid of my difficulties by dropping my five trout into his basket among the rest. I did not know enough of a sportsman's zeal to be aware that he would infallibly

detect the addition, as he doubtless knew every fish he had caught, and exactly where he had caught it; but I felt a little amusement in the idea that he would find his success greater than he fancied, and that, however deeply it might puzzle him, it would be quite impossible for him to guess at an explanation. I took care not to leave the red handkerchief, but folded it up and put it into my pocket. Then I took off my bonnet and went into the drawing-room. Irving, apparently glad to be released, rose, and left the room as I entered.

Maude was in the same chair, and in nearly the same attitude, as when I left her. But a book, which she was evidently not reading, lay open on her knee. I passed her without speaking, but filled her lap with ferns and wild flowers which I had gathered during my little walk. I felt as if the sweet fresh breath from out of doors must do her a little good.

She started, but did not look at me; I had never yet met her eyes. I saw her finger the fragrant heap, as if unconsciously picking out a violet or two which were hidden among the fern leaves. I turned away my face lest she should think I was watching her. When I looked back the flowers were gone. I felt a momentary hope that she had been arranging them in some vase, though there had been scarcely time for it. Alas—no! She had collected them all in her hands, and flung them out of window. There they lay on the grass outside, and I felt secretly aggrieved for their sakes as well as for my own. I kept my resolution, however, and took no notice, rebuking myself socretly for having felt so strongly tempted to break it before it was twenty-four hours old.

In the evening I summoned the household to prayers. I fancied that I could detect a look of wonder in Maude's great eyes, as if she were not quite accustomed to the practice; but she made neither comment nor resistance. I read a few verses of the Bible before prayers. I had settled with myself that I would read the Gospels by degrees in this manner, hoping that in some part of the wonderful story might be found a message for the poor troubled spirit which I so earnestly desired to soften, and thinking that she was more likely to be touched by the narrative than by the exhortations of Scripture. After this, our candles were lighted, and we went upstairs, Irvine attending upon Maude. We had to pass through Irvine's room in order to reach our own, the separate door of our own bedroom having been fastened up, so that the security of the prisoner was complete. Ours was a large, pleasant chamber with two windows, both looking upon the valley, and commanding an excellent view of the falls. Our beds were at opposite sides, mine being nearest to the door; a curtain across the middle of the room, which could be drawn and undrawn at pleasure, made something like privacy attainable. When it was drawn, the two doors were excluded from Maude's division.

I held out my hand to her, and wished her good night. She stared and shrank, but did not actually reject the little courtesy. What a burning hand she put into mine—what wistful, gloomy, dreary eyes she fixed upon me for a moment! I felt as if I did not wish to meet them again. I could not analyse their expression, but I lay thinking of it for a long time before I went to sleep. *What* did it tell me?

Surely something more than mere rebellion and sullenness. Surely it told that the evil had brought so much suffering, that if only a way could be found of comforting her, she might be reclaimed. Yet I had so strong a conviction that any premature or open attempt to move her, or to persuade her that I felt for her, would be a failure, and an obstacle to future success, that I could only renew my resolution to be quiet and wait, happen what might.

VIII.—AN ADVANCE.

I kept my resolution, hard as it was, and often as I was on the point of breaking it when I checked myself. My hopes rested chiefly upon the youth of the patient. If only I did not break down, she must. The dismal monotony of the life she was leading *could* not become permanent at seventeen. How deeply soever she might have erred—how much soever she might have undergone—the fire of hope *could* not be utterly extinct in a breast of seventeen; and as soon as the faintest spark showed itself, I should begin to see my way. I was vigilant and alert—prepared to act upon the first demonstration she might make, to follow it up cautiously, and to let nothing escape me. I think my absolute quiescence affected her strangely. At first, perhaps, it was baffling and irritating—nothing more. By degrees she began to feel almost at her ease in a companionship which was so like solitude. She grew accustomed to the perpetual spectacle of my occupations, which had no reference whatever to herself. She found herself unwatched and unnoticed, and she unconsciously acquired a sense of security. Little indications of this change showed themselves from

time to time. Occasionally she would rise and pace the room, or go to the window and stand for a while looking out upon the woods. She seemed to me like some wild creature newly caught, which crouches for a long time in the corner of its cage in a paralysis of mere terror, but if let alone will creep out and begin to examine doubtfully the conditions of its new existence. At last, if it is not tormented, it accepts them, and submits to them, takes its food quietly, and is tamed. The first time she left her seat, and made one of her little excursions through the room, I was aware that she cast many a furtive glance towards me, and there was a hurry and tremor in her movements which I interpreted after my own manner. I am sure that if I had gone to her, and said in a friendly, cheerful tone, "I am so glad to see you moving about a little" (what could be more natural than that I should have done so?), it would have been all over with my hopes for another fortnight at least. I pursued the line of policy which I had prescribed to myself; did not once lift my head from the letter which I was writing, and left her completely to herself. Anything so aimless and melancholy as those wanderings I never saw. Her step was languid and irregular; her head bent and motionless; her eyes restless and vacant; her hands hanging loosely downwards. I am sure that if there had been the slightest disorder in her dress, she might have stood as a model for some picture of incipient madness; but Irvine's handiwork was faultless, and the exquisite arrangement of her toilet contrasted strangely with the wild and desolate expression of her face. She had, however, a way of burying her face in her hands, which somewhat discomposed

the symmetry of the great masses of magnificent hair, so that by the time the day was half over, she was so like the image which my shuddering fancy had conjured up, that I could hardly bear to look at her. I reminded myself again and again that Mr. Langley had assured me there was not the slightest symptom of mental disease.

One day while she was thus straying about the room, she suddenly stopped and opened the door. My eye was upon it immediately, and I saw Irvine sitting by the window in the hall, busy with her needlework. Maude, of course, saw her too, and withdrew with a baffled look. She did not give up her intention, however, but walked rapidly to the drawing-room window, and was just going to step out on the lawn when I joined her.

"Don't come!" said she, turning upon me almost as if she would have stopped me by force.

I answered her very earnestly, "I cannot help it, I have promised not to let you be alone. I will annoy you as little as I possibly can—you can forget that I am by, and take no notice of me—but I *must* keep my promise."

She went back to her seat with the air of an empress, lifting her head, curling her proud lip, and withering me with the flash of her eyes. As she left me she said, with an accent of indescribable scorn, "I hope you like your gaoler's business!"

"No," replied I, gravely; "how can I like it? It is extremely disagreeable."

"Then why did you undertake it?"

"It is my office, and I am paid for it, and of course I must fulfil my duties. You are able to make them plea-

sures instead of pains if you choose. I am obliged to perform them, but you see that I am determined to make them as little oppressive or painful to you as I can."

She made me no answer. I had spoken very clearly and steadily, and I hoped that she would inwardly digest my little statement about our relative positions. I had got it ready some time ago, intending to present it to her on the first opportunity. It was so entirely matter-of-fact that I thought it could hardly fail of having its effect in time. I thought she could hardly fail to see that I had justly described my intentions towards her, and that if her distrustful spirit once admitted the idea that I was trying not to give her pain it might soften her. And I was particularly anxious to have my salaried services and consequent obligations set in their clearest light before her. Half-civilized human beings are very apt to regard these things as subjects of legitimate sarcasm. It is well to take the barb off the arrow.

My daily walks continued, but I saw no more of the young fisherman. I took for granted that he was on a walking tour, and that he had left the country. I kept his handkerchief—which was rather a peculiar one, of some foreign silky material not quite familiar to me—wrapped up in paper in the back of one of my drawers. I never heard how the miraculous arrival of fish had been received by old Gwythyr, but I either saw, or fancied, that there was something a little odd in his manner to me. He was perfectly respectful, but I sometimes suspected that he was watching me. I certainly met him in all kinds of out-of-the-way places when I was exploring the country. I

could not help remarking the fact that I never took a walk after that first day without meeting him.

I sent regular reports to Mr. Langley, as I had been desired, though as yet there was really nothing to report. He wrote to me twice a week—short, kind notes, expressing his satisfaction and encouraging me to persevere. He never failed to remind me that he wished to hear from me frequently and openly. I omitted to say that on the morning of his departure I found on my dressing-table my first quarterly payment enclosed in an envelope, and accompanied by a few courteous words, in which he informed me that it was always his practice to pay in advance.

The post-bag was always brought to me in the morning as I left my bed-room. I used to find Gwythyr waiting with it in the hall. Irvine always contrived that her young lady's toilet should last a little longer than mine, so that I never had to open the bag in Maude's presence. Twice I gave her a letter from her sister Bertha, sent by Mr. Langley. On both these occasions she looked at the signature, and then tore the letter up without reading it. No letter came separately to her, so that it had not as yet been necessary for me to observe the precaution imposed by Mr. Langley with regard to her correspondence.

It was the tenth day of our miserable *tête-à-tête*, and I was beginning inwardly to confess myself conquered, and to revolve the possibility of a change of tactics. But there were symptoms that some crisis was at hand; and I still waited.

The symptoms were peculiarly disagreeable to me, and if they had continued I must have given way. All that

morning Maude stared at me. Never did I look up without meeting her mysterious eyes, withdrawn as soon as I met them, but resuming their vigilance as soon as I looked away. There was a fixedness in the expression which I thus momentarily encountered a dozen times, which showed that the moment was the close of a long, steady gaze. It was almost more than I could bear. Whether I worked, read, or wrote, I felt that those great luminous eyes were upon me. Two or three times I changed my seat, but to no purpose. Repeatedly I resolved not to look at her, but I could not hold my purpose; I could not help stealing one quick glance, and I always caught her in the act of looking away from me. It would have tried me less had she fairly met my gaze, but there was something in this perpetual, surreptitious, furtive watching which greatly disturbed my nerves. I could hardly resist the idea that she was going to spring upon me; and when at last she rose suddenly, and came straight up to me, I had some difficulty in keeping down an exclamation that was almost a scream.

"Is it not part of your business to teach me?" asked she, abruptly. It seemed as if she was taking up our conversation just where we dropped it a week ago.

"Yes," answered I. "Do you want to learn?"

"Yes," with a long, heavy, deep sigh.

"When shall we begin?"

"Now."

I suppressed my secret sense of victory, and would not even look at her lest she should detect it. In the quietest and simplest manner possible I fetched, and gra-

dually spread on the table before her, a goodly array of books, provided by Mr. Langley's forethought, and watched her as she looked helplessly at title after title, apparently quite unable to make up her mind about them. Presently she eyed me again, her hand resting upon the table.

"What do you know?"

The question was a little comprehensive. "I have taken a great deal of pains to learn how to teach," answered I, "and I can teach the beginning of a good many things. What do *you* know?"

"Nothing."

"That's well," said I, cheerfully; "then there is no fear of my not knowing enough to teach you, and we'll lose no time in going to work."

I did not suspect that her last answer was as near the literal truth as it was. She could read, write, and count —I think that was the extent of her acquirements. She had a natural gift for music, and, as I afterwards found, could sing and accompany herself by ear, but she did not know a note. Of history, geography, and the simplest elements of science she was absolutely ignorant; so ignorant that I really think every page of every book she read must have contained some allusion unintelligible to her. I took care not to express surprise, and not to dishearten her by attempting too much; I thought that if I should succeed in gaining her confidence as time went on, I might be able to elicit some of the causes of the marvellous neglect in which she had been suffered to grow up. I attributed much to the southern climate and half-civilized surroundings of her childhood; but how was I to account

for the four or five years which had passed over her mind since she came to England, and left it such an utter blank? There was no want of intelligence. Even the power of attention—so difficult to arouse if it has been suffered to sleep through childhood—was, as it were, forced into existence by a will as strong as iron. There could be no doubt of her intention to learn. She laboured with a determination that was almost painful, when she was once fairly set to work. I solved the mystery to myself by supposing that this tremendous will of hers had been in arms against education till now—but then, what had put it into a position of antagonism? and what had caused it to change sides? These were questions which I could not answer.

It was curious to see her begin to relapse into her natural languor a dozen times a day, and shake herself out of it. She would settle into one of her uncivilized serpentine attitudes, with bowed head and fixing eyes; often making me think that the brief ambition was over, and the listless vacuity about to return. Then in a moment a new expression would come over her face, as if a thought stung her sharply, and she would dart upon her books and work with tenfold energy. I did not spare her. I was certain that hard mental exertion was wholesome for her strangely diseased condition, and I stimulated her to it by every means in my power. I watched her carefully for any symptoms of unhealthy excitement, but could find none—the studies which drew her so forcibly out of herself for at least a part of every day seemed rather to allay than to increase the fever of her moral system. Several times I rose in the night and went softly to her bedside, to

ascertain if she was lying awake. I always found her sleeping. Before our studies began I had been aware that her nights were not tranquil. She often muttered and sobbed in her sleep, and she was very restless. These symptoms of nervous disturbance steadily diminished after the first two or three days of our mutual labour. I could not wish for a more satisfactory indication that I was in a right course.

On the second evening after our new mode of life began, I persuaded her to come out with me for a walk. I could not tell what induced her to consent. Whether it was a mere impulse, or a sense of obligation (for she had seemed perfectly aware of the trouble she was giving me), or simply an admission of my matter-of-fact statement that her health must suffer if she took no exercise, I do not know. But she came. We went up the hill-side together; it was a lovely evening, and a fresh breeze blew against our faces as we mounted. I noticed that her step was tremulous, like an invalid's, but when I looked towards her she turned away her face with an uneasy gesture. By the movement of her shoulders I could see that she was struggling with sudden tears. They would not be stopped. After two or three ineffectual efforts, which I thought it better not to notice, she sat down on the grass, buried her head between her knees, and sobbed and cried with hysterical violence. I had been warned that she was subject to these seizures, and I thought it quite probable that the unusual exercise and the cool air had produced one of them. I was afraid to show how sorry I felt for her. I merely said, "This will soon pass off. Don't

mind it. I shall let you quite alone." And it did pass off. But when she lifted up her face, it seemed so young, so troubled, so misused, with the great tears upon the flushed cheeks, and the loose hair falling over the forehead, that my feeling of compassion was almost irresistible. She caught me looking at her, and her expression of utter surprise was very strange. I could almost fancy that she had supposed me to be merely acting a part, and that when she now met my pitying look, and felt that it had been fixed upon her while her face was hidden, so that it could not have been assumed in order to produce an impression upon her, she for the first time admitted the idea that I might be really wishing her well. And I have no doubt that this *was* her thought, for she was certainly the most distrustful human being that I ever encountered.

On the whole I was not sorry for this fit of tears. There might be something more in it than merely physical emotion. It might be that this bruised spirit, coming against the sweetness and liberty of nature, felt a painful stimulus —such as a bruised limb may feel when the remedies are applied. But the pain in both cases might be the beginning of a cure.

That same evening I went out again by myself, after I had delivered Maude over to Irvine, and, as usual, I met Gwythyr. He touched his hat, but, instead of passing me or turning aside, he stopped and spoke.

"That 'ere young chap that come down with us the first evening, do you remember him, Miss?"

"Yes," said I, with a little secret trepidation; "what about him?"

"Why, he sent as queer a telegram to London as I ever heerd. I was over to market, and at the station I went to see my son, who is the clerk there, when that young feller come in. He didn't see me, but went straight up and gave his message, and I heerd it plain enough. 'The article has arrived safely;' that was all. I wonder now what the article was. He was as queer a article hisself as ever *I* see."

I laughed. "A wild boy," said I; "but boys are always wild, I think."

"He was a first-rate fisherman," observed Gwythyr, with a cunning glance out of his twinkling old eyes.

I did not make any answer to this observation.

IX.—HINTS AND HOPES.

I introduced as much variety as possible into our studies. My object was to stimulate and awaken the whole sensibility of this torpid intellect, and I tried point after point, till I should find a response from all. Under this treatment she rose like Undine's fountain when the stone was lifted off. There was evidently no want of natural sensibility, whatever else might be defective. Drudgery she had of course to go through, and I set it before her as drudgery, and as nothing else. "This must be learned; that must be mastered, before you can acquire power." But in the intervals of the drudgery I brought her in contact with all that I could imagine of beauty, nobleness, or interest, which she was capable of understanding, either in poetry or history, and watched the effect upon her with no small curiosity. It often took me by surprise. She

would pass, almost without notice, instances of endurance, words of pathos, pictures of sentiment, which I found extremely touching, and which I quite expected her to feel. Passion I, of course, avoided; I did not want to develop that side of her nature; I accepted her father's testimony about it, and sought no opportunity of forming an independent judgment, except by inference. But anything like heroism roused her in a moment. Great courage, uncompromising self-devotion, generosity, disinterestedness; these seemed to strike some chord in her heart, the vibrations of which she was scarcely able to endure. If such an instance occurred in any part of our reading her cheek would flush, her voice quiver, her eyes fill; she would hurry and gasp through the sentences as if she could hardly bear to wait for the end, and then look up with a momentary expression of triumph. Another thing struck and puzzled me very much in her. Whenever, in the course of our historical reading, we came upon a struggle for liberty, her sympathy was kindled in an instant—kindled so unmistakably and so warmly that I could almost fancy that she found in each such story a parable, with a personal reference to herself. Now I know enough of girl-nature to be aware that this kind of feeling is not characteristic of it when left to itself. Nothing is more difficult than to awaken enthusiasm for a cause in a girl's mind if her knowledge of it be derived solely from books; nothing easier if there is a personal element in it. The natural development of enthusiasm for a cause belongs to a later period of life, even in the educated. A girl's feelings are all personal, whether about herself or about others; she

does not generalize—far less fall in love with a generalization. She may be desperately loyal or violently republican, but her devotion is to a particular king or republic, and it has been instilled into her by surrounding influences. One of the first conclusions to which I came about Maude's history, from the evidence afforded by her state, was that there had been some powerful influence upon her, causing her to take a deep interest in all struggles for liberty and independence, and teaching her to look upon them as so many trophies of a great general battle which was to be won in the end. I also felt sure that some of the most striking stories in Greek and Roman history had been told to her, as stories. She knew them in such a strange imperfect way, yet with such vividness of appreciation; and they were literally the only things which she *did* know. Sometimes she caught greedily at a name, as if it were familiar to her, and as if she were impatient to give substance to her vague notions about it. I could not doubt that she remembered something imperfectly, and that she was most anxious to make her remembrance definite.

One day we were reading, in Gallenga's "History of Piedmont," the story of Pietro Micca, the soldier who voluntarily sacrificed his life at the siege of Turin, because there was not time to lay a train for the explosion of a mine, and who by his sacrifice saved the citadel. She read breathlessly till she came to the point in which he asks that his wife and children may be taken care of, and there came to a stop, literally unable to go further.

"Does he *do* it?" she gasped, fixing her eyes upon me. I took the book from her and read the conclusion aloud to

her. She sprang up, took a rapid turn through the room, repeating to herself, "I did not think he would! I did not think he would!" then came back and exclaimed, with her whole heart in the glistening eyes which she fixed upon me, "Oh! what a man!"

To these bursts of enthusiasm I always gave my fullest sympathy, but I never tried to improve such occasions even by the smallest and mildest attempt at a sermon. It is one of my theories that most of the good (I mean good to the mind, not to the body) which is done in this world is done indirectly. Nothing, I thought, could benefit her like the gradual acquisition of a lofty standard—the gradual construction of a pure and true type. And I also thought that it would be injurious to this process—which is as delicate and mysterious as the growth of a flower—to attempt to direct it openly, or to make it a subject of self-consciousness. The emotion was doing its work better than I could do it.

At another time, in reading this same history—which I noticed that she brought to me oftener than any other book—a few words of Italian occurred, untranslated. To my unspeakable astonishment she read them in due course with the rest of the sentence, and in a tone which showed that she understood them. One should have been as familiar as I was with the extent and depth of her ignorance to understand the startling effect of the little fragmentary morsels of knowledge which occasionally emerged from it, generally when they might have been least expected. I had got over my surprise at her odd corners of ancient history, but this new discovery was quite too much for me, and I could not restrain an exclamation.

"I know a little Italian," said she, quickly.

"Indeed!" I replied; "and how—"

She gave me a sudden look of such fiery indignation that it fairly stopped me. "I see what you mean," she cried, and, shutting the book, at once rose and walked away to the other end of the room.

By this time we had come gradually, uninterruptedly, and with many relapses, to a sort of understanding together, which made me feel that it would not be well to let this outbreak pass. I had been obliged to abstain carefully from anything like warmth or tenderness of manner. As I said before, she was the most distrustful, the most suspicious human creature that I ever encountered. She seemed to me to look upon every demonstration as if it were a trap. Luckily for me the habits of my family were not demonstrative; but I once unguardedly called her "my love," and I am sure that it shut her up close for a full day and a half. I took warning, and did not repeat the offence; and I confined my expression of affection or admiration exclusively to the characters of which we read, whether in history or poetry. On this ground we met, and here we had gradually arrived at something which might fairly be called conversation. Sometimes, when she was deeply moved—whether by admiration or disgust—I took the opportunity to give the feeling a wider scope, or a closer application. I would relate some parallel instance to her, if possible belonging to the regions of daily life, so as to lead her gently towards the conclusion that these great crimes and superb virtues might have their representatives among ourselves. This was almost my only didactic effort, and I thought

that it was attended with success, for I sometimes elicited a question or a remark which showed that her mind was working. More than once—and this I held to be the most hopeful sign of all—this remark or question was made the next day, so that I knew that it must be the result of reflection. These terms having gradually established themselves between us, I took courage, followed her to the window, and brought her to bay.

"I want to know what *you* mean," said I, firmly.

She turned away her head with the old, sullen, impenetrable movement, and answered nothing.

"Now," said I, "I am sure you are suspecting me, and you ought to tell me your suspicion, for I have always been fair and open with you. It is very little we can know of each other yet, but we may, at least, make sure that that little is true. I do not care what other notions you form about me just at present, but I *do* want you to be certain of one thing—that I always speak the truth to you."

"Nobody speaks the truth to me," answered she in a tone of utter despondency, still turning away her face. The words confirmed an idea which I had for some time entertained, and which was first suggested to me by her excessive suspiciousness—namely, that there had been, doubtless from the kindest intentions, too much trick and manœuvre in the system by which it had been attempted to manage her. Trains had been laid to induce her to a particular course of action; facts had been suppressed in order to avoid a violent burst of temper; she had perpetually found out that she was overreached, and though it was always for her own good, it had produced an intoler-

able sense of insecurity and helplessness. This one wound I was inexorably determined to heal; so I persevered.

"I never speak anything else to anybody," I replied; "I don't think I *could* if I tried. If I cannot speak the truth I hold my tongue. You will both insult and distress me if you do not believe me."

She turned slowly round and looked at me as if her eyes could have pierced me through and through; yet there was something strangely pathetic in the look—a kind of supplication, as if she wanted me to give her the power to believe in me. I must win her now, thought I, or never.

"I don't know what you thought," I went on, taking her two hands in mine whether she would or no, "and I won't ask you. It is a great pain to me, but let it pass. I give you my word of honour—I give it solemnly—that there was no secret meaning in the question which disturbed you, and that at this moment I cannot guess why it disturbed you. Let us now make a bargain for the future. I promise you—I will swear it, if you like—to be always straightforward and open with you. I will tell you the reasons of all I do and say—if there is anything that I am obliged to conceal from you, I will tell you that I am obliged to conceal it. You may be always sure that what you see of me is true as far as it goes, and you shall always be told when there is anything hidden. I will keep faith with you."

An indescribable irresolute hope seemed to rise in her eyes as I looked into them, and I felt her hands, which at first lay half-resisting in mine, closing upon them with a clasp of iron.

"*Will* you? Can you? Oh! *will* you, indeed?" she cried in a pitiful voice, like one who feels that she must surrender, and fears that it may be to captivity. "Oh! don't deceive me! I said I would never trust anybody! Oh! don't think it right to cheat me!"

Something in the accent of this appeal made my eyes overflow. "Ah! you are crying!" said she with fresh terror, "you are sorry for me because you know you must deceive me. You reproach yourself—ah! give it up—don't do it—it's wrong, it's cruel, it's false!"

"Poor child!" answered I, in a broken voice; "I am only crying for pity. I tell you truly—I would rather die than deceive you, whether for a good purpose or a bad."

She was mine! Never shall I forget the way in which she flung herself upon my neck. To my last hour, I think, I shall sometimes feel the pressure of her arms about me. I had won her. She was mine!

While she held me she spoke sobbing, "I have always been tricked and cheated. Nobody helps me—nobody at home loves me—I am in everybody's way—I only want to be let alone—I want to be good—I do really want to be good—everything in me is wrong, but it's not my fault—make me true—help me—love me—don't leave me—don't let me fall back again—Oh! love me, love me; do try to love me if you can!"

I did not try to reason with her. I only soothed her and kissed her. Then after a little while, I said to her cheerfully, "There must be two sides to our bargain, you know. You must be true with me."

She was so thoroughly softened by this outburst of feeling,

so broken and subdued for the moment, that I felt I must not rely too much on the permanence of any promise that she might make. She could not bring out more than a few words at a time, and those scarcely articulate. She had seated herself, or rather, I should say, dropped as if unable to support herself, upon a footstool, and I stooped over her to catch her murmured answer, "As far as I can."

"I shall *trust* you," said I, earnestly.

"Not too much, not too much," was her rapid answer. "Oh! what shall I do?"

"Do as I do. Promise not to deceive—you need not promise not to conceal. I won't press for your confidence yet."

She bowed her face slowly forward upon her knees, while the crimson flush which covered it spread even to the curve of her bending neck. "You know why I was sent here and shut up?" whispered she.

"I know it very vaguely," said I. "I know absolutely nothing in connection with it which can explain your suspicion of me just now—your *past* suspicion, gone, you know, for ever. But I don't wish to hear particulars; I think it is better not to go into them. I take for granted that all is going to be very different now."

She lifted her head and looked at me. "Ah!" she cried, "perhaps I shall tell you some day—perhaps—I *think* I shall. But don't fancy I shall ever be different, for that would be deception."

"We will hope," said I, gently.

"Don't turn my heart against you now," exclaimed she, excitedly; "I can't bear it!"

I thought it wiser not to urge her any further. And,

indeed, her agitation had been so great that her frame was still quivering from head to foot, and the deep glow was giving way to an alarming paleness. I resolutely put an end to the scene, and made her drink some water, and lie down to rest. The best remedy for her exhaustion supplied itself after a little while, and she fell asleep.

I sat and watched her. If I had not been so deeply moved, I must have tried to sketch her, that profound repose was so beautiful. All the proud, passionate, changeful expressions were gone out of her face, and, if it had not been for the mould of her magnificent form, I might have taken her to be a mere child. Tears were still on her cheeks —an occasional slight sob ruffled the tranquillity of her slumber, but she made no movement, the heavy dark eyelashes rested close and motionless upon the slightly flushed cheeks, and the hands lay relaxed and still. My thoughts were strange and troubled while I looked at her. I tried to collect and arrange them. It was impossible; the only definite idea which came out of them was a hope that she had been somehow misunderstood and mismanaged, and that she would turn out well in the end. Odd guesses about the course of her former life forced themselves upon me, but they were so incoherent that I could as yet make nothing of them. Somebody had taught her Italian. Somebody had told her stories out of the histories of Greece and Rome. Somebody had inspired her with a strong enthusiasm for liberty, and a vehement, unpractical admiration for all the heroic virtues. This had been her whole education. Who was Somebody? I could not bring myself to believe that it was the pianoforte-tuner.

X.—NEW LIGHT.

I have said that I am not sanguine. It was therefore no disappointment to me that a reaction followed the scene which I have just described. I expected it. I knew that the height touched by the impulse of a great emotion is seldom maintained. I was quite satisfied when I found that the backward swing left us still greatly in advance of our former position. And, after a few days, progress began again. Some of the phases of the change were very curious. One of the best symptoms was extreme ungraciousness. If Maude came down to breakfast with averted eyes, barely touched my offered hand, and answered my observations with a scarcely articulate murmur, I knew that some fresh concession was at hand. In the course of that day it was made, after the manner of an affront, and received by me as a matter of course, as if I hardly noticed it. On such occasions the expression of her face was remarkable. It said more plainly than words, "I know that I am conquered, and I don't like to own it." There was something almost comic in the parts we thus acted towards each other, each seeing so easily through the other's transparent mask. I allowed it for a time. The proverb, "Hurry no man's cattle," is one of my favourites. But I never intended that it should last. I was ready with my tonic as soon as the patient should be strong enough to bear it.

For one sure hope I waited—on one strong auxiliary I relied—the creature was so young! This vigorous nature *could* not be without the indestructible elasticity of the

morning time. How often during the life of each one of us, do friends use the phrase, pregnant with so common a history, "She is beginning to recover her spirits!" How seldom, thank God! can it be said of any one that this healing process never began! It was for this "beginning" that I watched. It came at last, though after a longer delay than might have been expected. I welcomed its first indications—something more of readiness in the movement, and of quickness in the glance—attention more awake, more unconscious, and of wider scope—words spontaneous, and accents varying from that hard, monotonous gloom which made the hearer's heart sink, because it carried in its every sound such a history of suppression. The first free smile was a triumph unspeakable; but what music ever equalled the ring of the first laugh I heard from her lips! I was afraid that she should see how deeply it touched me—the first breath of natural gaiety brought home to me so painfully the meaning of its long absence. To have lived six months in the house with a girl of seventeen, and not once to have heard her laugh!

When this point was reached, I began to introduce a little occasional and very gentle ridicule into my treatment, with the best possible effect. I made her laugh at her own *sauvageries;* and then I made her ashamed of them. They disappeared in a week; doubtless it was pride which sprang up and drove them away with such ignominy, but I thought that it was a good use to make of pride.

One day, when she brought me a little bunch of late violets (I had been shut up with a cold, and she had been compelled to take her walks with Irvine), I said to her,

as I took them, "I think, Maude, it would be breaking our compact of truth if I were not to tell you how much better I like the violets because you give them to me."

"Oh! don't talk about compacts," cried she, with one of her deep, sudden blushes; "I had forgotten all about it. It comes by nature now."

By that day's post I wrote to Mr. Langley, to tell him how confident I was that the cure was now radical and complete. I had reported progress from time to time in tones of increasing hope, and had been answered kindly and encouragingly, but I thought, rather incredulously. I told him now how satisfactory her conduct was in all respects; how rapid was her improvement in her studies; how different she was from the listless, moody, irritable sufferer who had been confided to my care. I asked his authority for a little relaxation of the painful bondage in which she was kept. I said I thought that it would be beneficial to her to feel that we were beginning to trust her, and I promised to be extremely vigilant and cautious if he would allow me to exercise a little discretion about the restraints placed upon her. This was his answer—"If you relax at all, it must be within very narrow limits, and you must, as far as possible, substitute espionage for direct control. I am very sorry to say this, and I fear lest it may annoy or dishearten you; but if you knew the past, you would feel that I had no choice. I earnestly hope that the reformation may be as thorough as you believe it to be; the time for testing it approaches, and then we shall see. You must not forget that there has been a total absence of temptation, as well as complete prevention of

any independent action. I always hoped that seclusion, under your wise and judicious guidance, would produce a healthier state; but I am afraid that the atmosphere which produced it is still necessary, if it is to be maintained. Do not be angry with me for thinking thus; I shall rejoice to confess myself mistaken. I am suddenly compelled to leave home on important business, and I must ask you, for the present, to address your reports to Mrs. Langley, who is fully acquainted with my wishes and intentions, and will be able to answer your questions as satisfactorily as myself. Perhaps you will think that is not saying much under the circumstances."

This letter provoked me. "Absence of temptation and prevention of independent action!" said I to myself; "yes, of course, that is just the mischief. Why can he not allow me just one experiment, to confute either his reasoning or mine? And as for temptations, I am sure these incessant restraints must be incessant provocations. I wonder she bears them as well as she does."

Nothing was more remarkable in Maude, since her mind had recovered its health, than the quickness with which she perceived any difference in those around her. It was a gift and an intuition. She penetrated without being able to help it—almost without knowing what she did. Several times she had called my attention to some little ailment or depression in one of the servants which I should never have noticed, but which she discovered at a glance. She entered the room while I was reflecting over my letter, and perceived in an instant that something had disturbed me.

"What is the matter?" asked she; "have you a headache?"

I denied. She looked anxiously at me, but asked no further questions. I saw that she was very uneasy, and when we had finished breakfast I resolved upon a bold stroke.

"Maude," said I, "something is the matter, and it is about you."

She came silently up to me and listened, clasping her hands tightly upon her breast.

"It is nothing very bad," continued I, lightly; "it is only something I want you to do."

"Well; tell me."

"I want you to convince Mr. Langley that he may trust you as I do. I want you to write him a letter—just a few words; you will know what to say—just make him understand what you are really feeling and wishing. Don't shake your head so vehemently. I want him to know that he may venture to relax some of these vexatious restraints, and to treat you like a rational being."

Maude dropped her head on her bosom, while her foot tapped the ground impatiently. "He had better not relax one of them," said she in a very low voice.

I looked at her in amazement. She was at once so impulsive and so reserved, that it was difficult to detect what was passing in her mind. I could not even conjecture what strange fancy possessed her now.

"Leave it as it is!" cried she impetuously, after a pause. "If I were to write such a letter I should be a wretch."

"You distress me," said I, venturing to urge her a little. "Maude, is it not worth while to make a great effort when it is for the sake of your own father?"

"He is *not* my father!" she passionately exclaimed.

Again I was silent in astonishment.

"No, he is *not*," she reiterated. "Of course you know nothing about it. How should you? You always stop me if I begin to tell you anything about the past; and it is but very little I would tell anybody. I know he is always called my father, and has been for years; but, thank God! there is nothing of him in me. I am the child of his first wife, who was a widow when she married him. Poor thing! I hardly remember her; I dare say he killed her."

There was nothing very strange or incredible in this revelation. It was quite consistent with the benevolence which I had always attributed to Mr. Langley, that he should treat his step-daughter as if she had been his own child. But I was puzzled at her being called by his name, and at his concealment of the truth from me.

"Well," said I, doubtfully, "if this be so—"

"You don't think I am telling you a falsehood!" cried Maude, with a flash which seemed as fiery in her voice as in her eyes. "Ah! let it alone; please do! We were getting happy. I don't want any change. I don't mind being a prisoner if you stay here; but you will be taken away if they find out that you know." (She had changed to a tone of intense supplication.) "I have been called Langley ever since I came to England, and they don't know that anybody has told me the truth."

"*Are you sure it is the truth?*" asked I. "Are you sure

that there is not some mistake—that some one has not deceived you?" I really thought this the most natural explanation of the matter.

She looked strangely at me. "Perhaps!" she said; "it is quite possible, and what does it signify? I don't want to think or talk any more about it. It's all nonsense. I want to go for a walk—a long walk—to the grounds of Clytha House. Don't you remember you said we should go there again? Let us take luncheon with us and eat it in the summer-house, and dine a little later. You will, won't you? It is a splendid morning."

Again she had put on what I called her "begging voice," which it was very difficult to resist. My thoughts were confused, and I deemed it best to drop the subject for the present. I had not yet ceased quite to fear that I might incautiously throw her back into a state of rebellion or moodiness. So I complied with her request and we went out together.

Maude strayed away from me during our walk, looking for ferns, not for any botanical purposes, but because we liked to decorate our room with them. We had made this little excursion several times before. Clytha House was about three miles from Parc Rhaiader, so that we required a rest before returning. The house was, as I have mentioned, unoccupied, and the grounds excessively pretty, though neglected. We had a favourite summer-house seat, commanding a view of the source of the little river whose falls constituted the chief beauty of Parc Rhaiader. We had made friends with the old woman who had charge of the house, and knew that we might reckon upon her hospitality for a draught of milk.

I walked on, turning our last conversation round and round in my thoughts, but unable to come to any satisfactory conclusion about it. It was quite true that I had checked or evaded the very few attempts which Maude had ever made to enter upon any particulars of her former life. I was afraid of the subject; afraid of misrepresentations and fictitious confessions; afraid of touching unhealed wounds; afraid of finding myself in a position in which I must so decidedly condemn that I might injure my newborn influence. I thought it best to wait till the peaceful habits of our life should have had time to work their soothing effects upon her, and till the moral sense which seemed to me to be visibly growing in her should have developed and matured. By that time I thought she would probably not wish to confess, she would wish to evade the past, and to think her new thoughts with as few clogging and harassing memories as possible. I could not say that she had shown much wish to confess as yet. She was not communicative. She gave instant expression to the impulse of the moment, but she scarcely ever told either what she felt or what she had done. But once or twice, when an allusion was inevitable, she had begun to explain, and I had always, with intention, checked the explanation. She desisted in an instant, and seemed rather relieved than repelled. In fact, she had never begun one of these explanations without a degree of emotion and confusion painful to witness. The sight of any sort of agitation is so disagreeable to me that I am apt unconsciously to do everything in my power either to avoid it, or to smooth it over; and I have repeatedly had to regret that this constitutional

peculiarity has made me seem unsympathetic or cowardly when I have been guiltless of either fault in my heart.

I had now, however, arrived at a point at which I was beginning to think that I *ought* to hear whatever Maude had tell. I looked forward to a successful mediation between her and her family. I knew their view of her, and I thought that it required a good deal of modification. I thought that I could effect this without annoyance, for there was so much manifest improvement in her that they might easily be induced to recognise it without the humiliation of owning themselves wrong from the beginning. And there was still so much that was faulty, snch an impetuous, fiery, proud, vehement nature, that I could not doubt that there was much in her view of her own case which might be corrected by a little judicious discussion. I determined to change my tactics, therefore, and to urge her to tell me any part of her history that she might be inclined to communicate.

While I was thus musing, she came back to me from her fern-gathering, and addressed me with one of her sudden questions, which I used laughingly to say took my breath away. It had reference to what we had been reading the day before, "The Conquest of Mexico," which had led to a conversation upon slavery.

"If England," said she, "is so generous about slaves, why is she so mean about refugees?"

"What on earth do you mean?" answered I, in a state of hopeless bewilderment.

"Why, you told me," said Maude, looking steadily at her ferns, "that all slaves are free who set foot upon English *soil. Is not* that generous?"

"Well, it is just."

"It's right, and that's all I care about," cried she. "But is it right, is it just, is it generous, to denounce refugees—men who have been guilty of no crime, but who are only patriots—to denounce them to their own governments, and give them up to be punished?"

"It would be a crime, indeed," I replied, "but it is not done. It is one of our boasts that we receive fugitives from all countries, and give them shelter and safety. We are often accused of carrying our hospitality too far, and allowing them to plot against their own governments while iving under our protection."

How shall I describe the eagerness with which she looked at me while I spoke? Her eyes were positively hungry. "Do you mean to say," she stammered, "that exiles are safe in England; that they wouldn't be given up; that they couldn't be taken prisoners and carried away, not even if the government which exiled them was an ally of ours?"

"Certainly not," said I. "Think of all the persecuted men who, whether right or wrong, have found a home and a shelter here. We have had Kossuth from Hungary, and Orsini from Rome, and—"

"A man from Rome," interrupted she; "who did you say?—who?"

"Orsini. He was no credit to us, unfortunately; he is the man who afterwards tried to assassinate the Emperor Napoleon."

"Oh! I know; I remember," she said, hesitating. "But I don't think you quite understand me. If there

had been somebody who knew the particular offence for which any one of these men had been banished, and who chose to proclaim it, would he not have been given up then?"

"Given up! Nonsense!" cried I. "Not unless he were guilty of murder, robbery, or arson. Not if he were only a political offender. Who has been putting these ideas into your head?"

"Mr. Langley," answered she, lifting her lip with that peculiar arch of scorn which had so often baffled me when we first came together; "and so I dare say they are all false. Answer me one more question, please. Can it ever be reckoned murder to kill a man in battle or a siege? I mean, suppose one side called itself the rightful government, and called the other side rebels?"

"I see what you mean," interrupted I. "We in England should not dream of reckoning it murder. A rebel soldier who had killed a dozen men in fair fight would be safe with us."

"There can be no doubt of it," thought I to myself, "the Italian master is a political exile, and I don't believe for a moment that he is the pianoforte-tuner. But is it possible that Mr. Langley has been taking advantage of her boundless ignorance to separate her from an unworthy or unsuitable connection by such representations as these? The end may be good enough—but the means?" In spite of myself, my faith in Mr. Langley was beginning to waver. These considerations only strengthened my desire to come to a clear understanding with Maude, and I was just reminding myself that there was no time like the pre-

sent, and preparing to startle her with a sudden question on *my* part, which should embody all the facts I had secretly collected together touching this invisible instructor, when we were interrupted.

XI.—NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

We had been walking through the grounds of Clytha House, and we had reached the summer-house. To our surprise, we found it occupied. A lady was on the seat, looking out upon the valley, and a little girl stood beside her arranging some shells and pebbles upon the rustic table.

It was a young lady so girlish in her appearance that I scarcely thought she could be the mother of the child. She was short, and very small in all her proportions, delicately fair and pale, though with no appearance of ill-health, and exceedingly pretty; with soft sparkling eyes, lips that seemed made only for talking and laughing, and the most graceful figure that I ever saw. She wore a blue dress and a white cloak—I remember the combination well—there was a gala look about it which I afterwards found to be characteristic of her in all things. Her hair, which was blonde and very abundant, was uncovered—a little black straw hat lay on the seat beside her.

The child was a repetition of herself in miniature, only with a little more bloom and plumpness, and with the blonde locks falling about the shoulders instead of being wound around the head. She might be seven years old. She, too, wore a blue frock and a white cloaklet, and as her upturned smiling face met the bending face of her

companion, also radiant with smiles, they would have made a very pretty picture.

Our arrival disturbed them, and while we stopped short in embarrassment, the elder lady came forward to meet us, blushing a little, but with a decided air of welcome.

"Oh, pray come in," she said; "we are so glad to see you; we hoped you would come."

"Thank you," said I, hesitating. "I am afraid—we did not know—"

"Old Jenny told us you sometimes came, and May and I have been waiting and wishing, haven't we, May? We have been here nearly a month, and we wanted to know you so much; but we thought—that is, my husband thought—we must not venture to call. We have been laying all sorts of trains, but none of them succeeded. May and I went three times over to Parc Rhaiader, but we never contrived to meet you."

Meantime May, who at first hung her head and kept in the background, had sidled up to Maude, and taking hold of her hands with a kind of shy courtship that was very bewitching, had drawn her into the summer-house—I had no choice left but to follow.

"Oh! thank you, this is so kind!" cried our hostess, with such glee of manner that she seemed almost ready to begin dancing. "Now, May, run to the house for some milk. We know all your habits. You have brought your luncheon, and so have we. We shall be quite a party." She said this with a little musical chuckle, which often accompanied her words; it is a sound frequent in childhood, but very seldom heard afterwards, and it always

gives me an idea of joy in life, hardly expressible to the same extent in any other way.

May still had Maude by the hand, and she said, coaxingly, "Will you come too?"

"Oh, May, that's rude!" This was the mother's rebuke, if mother she was. The child, who was darting off, stopped in an instant. "Is it?" asked she, anxiously; "I'm so sorry."

"No, no!" cried Maude, fascinated, and looking as if the unfamiliar touch of a child's hand brought back, for the moment, her own not very distant childhood. "I like it."

"Do you?" exclaimed May, in delight; "then come!" and without waiting for any further permission, she went off like a little fawn, still keeping her hold upon Maude, who ran with her. I did not know how to prevent it.

"Now, please sit down," continued our new acquaintance, who certainly seemed to be rather voluble. "You look quite bewildered. I do so hope you don't mind it, for it is such a pleasure to us."

"We are very much obliged, indeed," said I, feeling that I must make some kind of speech. "We are quite ashamed of our intrusion, but we had no idea that Clytha House had been taken. This will be a great pleasure for Miss Langley, if her father allows it. I will write to him to-morrow. He did not wish us to make—to be—" I found my words and manner extremely ungracious, and I came to a sudden stop.

"To be acquainted with us," rejoined she, in a pathetic voice. "Oh, but that would be too unkind after the

acquaintance is begun. Besides, I rather think my husband knows Mr. Langley. And I do assure you we are quite respectable; you needn't be afraid of us. I am going to tell you who we are. My husband is Colonel Seyton—not in the army at all now—but he was in the —th Lancers, and was invalided after the Crimea. He is very nearly well again now. We are down here for shooting and fishing. My name was Daventry before I married; that is more than eight years ago; a long time, isn't it?"

"A much longer time than I should have thought possible," said I, not able to restrain the expression of my surprise.

"Ah! I dare say," replied Mrs. Seyton, with a look of annoyance; "everybody thinks I look so childish. I *wish* I didn't. I am more than four-and-twenty, I assure you."

"And the little girl is yours, then?"

"My only one. Little May. We always call her Little May, because I am May, too. Here she comes."

Little May appeared, carrying a jug of milk in her two hands, and proudly refusing all assistance from Maude, who followed with a look of amusement.

"I would not let *her* help me, you know," said she, as she placed her heavy burden upon the table, "because it might tire her."

"I should think it might tire you more, little one," observed I, laughing.

"Oh, but you know, she is so very new," replied the child apologetically, "that I thought perhaps it would not *be right* to use her for anything."

We sat down to our banquet. Such a merry meal! Such a strange contrast to the last six months for me: to the last—nobody knows how long—for Maude! The unaccustomed mirth rather silenced us, and made Maude wonderfully shy; but the mother and child chattered so incessantly that this was scarcely noticed. They made perpetual appeals to each other; there was a constant running chorus of "Wasn't it, May?" and "Isn't it, mamma?" through the whole of their conversation, which was ostensibly addressed to us, and in the course of which we learned all the particulars of their coming down to Clytha, and of the following three weeks, accompanied by no small amount of information about their preceding lives and adventures.

I was just going to take advantage of a little interval, and to announce that we must go home, when a clear, loud voice rang through the garden, "May! May! Not Little May—Old May!"

Up sprang Mrs. Seyton, with a blush and a sparkle; "There's Frederick!" she exclaimed, as she ran off.

"Don't come, darling; I'll bring him in a moment."

The child was on her feet, looking as rapturous as the mother, but she sat down again obediently, and waited, though I could see that every fibre of her small body was quivering with impatience.

"Has papa been away long?" asked Maude, caressing her.

"Oh! *so* long," she replied. "Ever since seven o'clock this morning!"

Maude looked at me in silent wonder. Then, after a pause, she said, in a low voice, "Do you suppose this sort of thing goes on every day?"

"This sort of welcome?" returned I. "Well, don't you think it must make life very pleasant and bright?"

"It seems to me as if it must be such a trouble to get it up so often," answered Maude, with an odd, half-satirical, half-melancholy look, and a sigh of weariness.

"But suppose it comes by nature?" suggested I.

It certainly came by nature to Little May, who, with all her obedience, was perfectly unable to keep herself stationary in the same place. She had stolen to the door, and was holding by it, twisting herself round the edge, and peeping as far round as she could, that she might be sure to get the first possible glimpse of the new comer. He appeared, and, with a shout of glee and triumph, she rushed out to him, clasping him so tightly that she effectually prevented his advance for a minute.

I glanced at Maude. She was sitting with her head bent down, as if she was either ashamed or afraid to look at this little family scene. But all the sarcasm had vanished from her face; her eyes were dim and soft, and there was in them an indescribable earnestness of contemplation, as if she were looking, not at the reality, but at some inward picture, familiar to her imagination.

Colonel Seyton came forward to be introduced. His manner was perfectly polite, but I did not feel a moment's doubt that in his heart he would much rather have come home to enjoy himself with his two Mays, uninterrupted by necessary civilities to strangers. So, likewise, I thought that, feeling such civilities to be necessary, he would have preferred to offer them without a child hanging round his waist, and a wife clasping his arm with demonstrative

closeness. But he endured both these inconveniences like a man, and I felt certain that the two Mays had their way with him, even if they required the sacrifice of his natural tastes and peculiarities.

He was a small, spare, soldierly-looking man, at least twenty years older than his wife. His face was not handsome, but full of intelligence, with remarkably quick piercing eyes, and a most winning smile; he had a look of recent ill-health, but so much animation that one could not but fancy that the ailments were only temporary; his beard and mustachios were streaked with grey, and his forehead slightly bald. "A pleasant-looking, inconspicuous middle-aged gentleman," thought I to myself; then reading the language of his wife's appealing face, I corrected my estimate, and added, "Oh no! A hero—a genius—a divinity!"

He acceded to the proposal that he and his Mays should escort us part of the way home, and he did not seem to mind in the least being kept waiting for his dinner, though he had been out shooting so many hours. I thought there really was something almost divine in this trait. Old May thought so too. She petted him, and pitied him, and apologized to him, and lamented over him, and admired him, and whispered to me that "there never was anybody who could fast so long without minding it, as Frederick; he was not like men in general; he did not care about eating." And, therefore, she did what she wanted, and I suspected that *he* was so accustomed to do what she wanted, that they were both scarcely conscious of the fact. I saw his look of astonished admiration at

Maude, and hoped that the privilege of contemplating her at his leisure during the walk might be some little compensation for his sacrifice. I rather wondered whether his admiration of beauty was always so keen and so apparent, and whether Old May quite liked it. I believe her security was absolute and well-founded—that whatever might be the charm of other faces, there was something in hers that was better to him.

We had a pleasant walk, and did not part company till we reached the height above the waterfall. Colonel Seyton told me that he had made Mr. Langley's acquaintance at Rio many years before.

"I remember his first wife," said he; "a beautiful woman, and very like her daughter."

"The first Mrs. Langley was a widow, was she not?" inquired I.

"Yes, a widow. Her husband was a man of enormous wealth; he was killed by some accident—I forget what—only two or three months after their marriage. She had one child—posthumous—still quite an infant when she married again. I remember what a sensation it created; people said it was not fair that one woman should make two splendid matches in two years, and be such a beauty herself besides."

"I suppose her triumphs did not last very long?" said I.

"No; she died within a twelvemonth of her second marriage, leaving this one child. Is the elder daughter living?"

"I really don't know," replied I. "My connection with

the family is very recent, and I never heard of the first marriage till the other day?"

"Then you can't tell me the name? It is very odd that it has escaped me. I have been trying to remember it ever since I discovered who our neighbours at Parc Rhaiader were. Well, I hope we shall improve our acquaintance. Mrs. Seyton is a good deal alone, and it will be really a charity if you will sometimes walk over to Clytha, or allow her to come to you."

"It will be a pleasure to us both," said I, cordially, "and I will write to Mr. Langley to-morrow for permission. I am only the governess, and a very strict rule has been prescribed to me, which I have no doubt that I shall be allowed to break in this instance."

He caught my meaning in a moment, and was too well-bred to express in words the surprise which he looked. I suspected that he would have borne a prohibition from Mr. Langley with perfect resignation. A little silence ensued, during which I saw that he was watching his wife's bright face, as she eagerly prattled to Maude, almost caressing her with her pretty animated gestures. Then he turned to me, and said, "If you will be so kind as to give me Mr. Langley's address, I will write to him myself."

I gave it, and silently decided that Colonel Seyton was the best husband in the world.

XII.—COMING.

The next morning, while I was meditating upon Colonel Seyton's communications, and arriving at certain self-evident conclusions, which seemed to me to explain Maude's

mysteries and blunders, the post arrived. For the first time it brought a separate letter for Maude. Rather a suspicious-looking letter, I thought; unmistakably foreign paper and handwriting; and a London post-mark. I was, of course, obliged to send it to Mr.—or rather to Mrs.—Langley, according to my agreement, but I determined to tell Maude what I was about to do, and why. I thought this would be in accordance with our compact to be honest and true to each other, and that it might form a good starting-point for the confidential conversation which I was now anxious to obtain.

When I began the subject she was greatly agitated in a moment. She started up and came to me, entreating to be allowed to look at the envelope. She was trembling, and every particle of colour had forsaken her cheeks and lips. I could not refuse her, though I began to fear that I was judging unwisely. The direction was curiously written, thus—

To Mademoiselle

Maude Langley,

Parc Rhaiader,

Clytha.

[*Here followed the name of the post town.*]

The ink was of a deep violet colour. Maude gave but a glance, and withdrew with a scarlet blush. I noticed,

while I was writing my letter—an operation which could not be deferred, because I had to ask instructions relative to our new acquaintances—that she seemed quite incapable of occupying herself. She had fallen into one of the old attitudes—listless, motionless, absorbed. But there was not a trace of the old expression. I could not be mistaken in the look of deep, ardent delight which I read in her eyes, or the flush of hope which fixed itself upon her cheeks. As she sat with clasped hands and steadfast gaze, never swerving from its forward intentness, I thought that she might have been painted, with the motto "Expectation," and I could not help remembering, with vivid thankfulness, how different a picture I had watched only a few weeks ago.

We went to our books as usual. Somehow, I was afraid of touching on the subject of the letter, so I began with Colonel Seyton. "Do you know," said I, "Colonel Seyton remembers your mother?"

"Ah! Mrs. Seyton told me so."

"I suppose, Maude, it was at Rio that you passed your childhood?"

"No," she replied, "I was in an estancia near Montevideo. I was taken care of by my aunt, my mother's sister."

"Was it a happy time?" asked I.

"Oh!" she cried, with a kind of sob, "*was* it? I wish you could know. Look," she continued, taking my two hands in hers, and stooping to gaze into my eyes,—"understand, I will tell you what it was!" She paused, then dropped my hands with a sudden change of expression,

and turned away. "There, don't ask me about it; I can't."

"I want so much to hear something about those days," said I, entreatingly.

"Well, I will tell you a little," she answered. "My aunt married an Italian, one of the famous Italian Legion which defended Montevideo—you know, of course." (I was ashamed to let her see that I knew nothing about it.) "Well, when he went back to Italy two or three years afterwards, with Garibaldi, she was left behind. She was to follow when all should be over, and Italy free and safe. Several other wives and children were left. My aunt was taking care of me, and of my sister. My mother was dead. Mr. Langley was busy worshipping money, and was very glad to get rid of the two babies. I think he forgot us. When he remembered us, and wanted to take us back—that was after he married again, and found out how rich I should be—we were gone; my aunt had brought us to Italy. And when he found us at last, oh! it was all changed. My aunt was dead; we were living with poor people, quite poor, but so kind, who had taken us out of love and pity—and my sister was dying."

"That was your eldest sister," observed I.

"How *can* you say so," exclaimed she indignantly, "when you know it wasn't? That is what Mr. Langley wants to make out. He found me so ignorant and so wild, not even knowing years and days, never having been taught at all, he fancied he could make me believe anything. But I know quite well I was the eldest. I know all about it. I don't understand the business part of

it, but I know my grandfather was dead, and Mr. Langley had got all my mother's fortune; he did not know how much it would be till it came, and he wanted it all for his shop" (with an indescribable accent of scorn), "what *he* calls commerce. I am sure he is welcome to it. But *nothing* will make him believe that *we* do not want it, and so we are made miserable for a little while."

"*We?*" said I, inquiringly.

She covered her glowing face with her hands for a moment, then withdrew them and confronted me with an expression at once proud, ashamed, and defying, which I despair of representing by description. "Yes," she said, "we! Marco and I!" and then hid her face again.

"Am I disturbing you?" asked a gay voice, as Mrs. Seyton and her little girl danced in at the window.

"Oh, yes, I see I am," she added, stopping short as we rose to welcome her. "Please send me away if I am inconvenient. Colonel Seyton is gone off for the whole day with a new gamekeeper; and May and I felt so solitary, that we thought we would come and inflict ourselves upon you. But *pray* don't keep us unless you *quite* like it."

Nothing could be prettier than her coaxing manner as she made this little speech, and of course she gained her point. I felt, as I had felt the day before, that she was a person who always did gain her points with everybody, beginning from her husband. Those prosperous and triumphant ones of the earth always kindle within me a slight sluggish fire of opposition. I do not wish to baffle them myself, perhaps because I secretly know that the at-

tempt would be hopeless; but a feeling smoulders in my soul that to see them baffled by others would not break my heart. It is purely theoretical, however. I think that I should in reality be very sorry to see a look of mortification on that cloudless young face, and should try earnestly to clear it away, even if I thought that it was not there without good reason. In fact, it requires nothing but an interval in the continuity of triumph to make me wish that the course should be resumed.

The afternoon was of course wasted, but we made considerable progress in our intimacy with the two Mays, and liked all that we saw. The child's nature was evidently much deeper than the mother's, but the mother was a pretty and pleasant flower for an old soldier to wear in his bosom, and I have no doubt that she supplied his life with all that it needed. She was evidently as proud of him and as fond of him, as it was possible for a woman to be. Once or twice, in the course of her prattle, which was all about people and events, with never a word about things or thought, I caught myself wondering what kind of a companion she would be ten years hence. But I remembered that, by that time, she would be endeared by ten years more of habitual petting, and would assuredly be just so much more indispensable and beloved than she was now. I fancied that by that time the child might be a friend while the wife was still a pet, and I did not cease unwinding this unreal skein of thoughts and fancies till I caught myself saying inwardly, "How much he will miss Little May when she marries!" and then I stopped short, laughing at myself.

We agreed to walk home together in the evening, but when the time came Maude pleaded a headache, and remained behind. The weather was bright, clear, and mild, and I thought that I should enjoy my solitary return, even though it might be delayed till after sunset. We parted at some little distance from Clytha House, and I began to stroll homewards, enjoying myself quite as much as I expected, for in that quiet valley there could not be a particle of fear to spoil my pleasure. It was a thoroughfare to nowhere, and the few cottagers who inhabited it were models of rough politeness, and would not have annoyed "the ladies" for the world. Between Parc Rhaiader and Clytha, however, it was very rare to meet even a cottager on our side of the stream. The road lay along the other bank, and the way by which I had to proceed was an old footpath, formerly established as a means of communication between the two houses, but so long disused as to be in many places scarcely traceable. There was no fear of my losing my way, however, so long as I kept to the outskirts of the woods; it mattered very little whether I was a few yards above or below the actual line of path; the general bearings were clear enough, and I knew the difficulties pretty well, and took care not to entangle myself either among boulders too big to be scrambled over without inconvenience, or furze too thick to be traversed without an unpleasant amount of pricking and scratching.

I was about halfway home, and having reached an open space at rather a higher elevation than usual, I paused to delight myself with the picture before I descended into a certain hollow filled with trees and brushwood, which

must be crossed ere I could again come out into the open country. The picture was worth looking at. A belt of red light—the last trophy of a superb winter sunset—was still visible over the curved and changeable outline of the hills at one side of my way. For a considerable space it was crossed by a long wavy line of fir-trees, which crested one of the lowest of these hills. Everybody knows how beautiful a thing is a line of fir-trees with ruins of sunset behind it; and no one will wonder that I lingered for some time tracing the contours of purple stem and swart foliage, and pausing over the bright spaces here and there, where a leaf or a spray was cut so sharply against its background of pale fire, that I could have painted its portrait, even from my present distance. From this sight, which I was leaving behind, I turned to look upon the valley before me; the moon was well up, and a long sweep of hill, wood, rock, and water, was visible under its lovely light. Not a sound but the soft trickle of the stream, continuous, but with just so much of variety in its pleasant murmur that you could have told with shut eyes that it was the music of nature, and not the whirr of machinery. Not a movement, not even the quiver of a leaf; the birds were all gone to bed, and no breeze was astir. I was looking at the silver summits of the low copse into which I was about to descend, and thinking that their motionless leaves, made crystalline by the moonlight, might almost be compared to the foliage of a frozen forest, when, to my surprise, I saw a movement amongst them. There was no question about it. A quick sinuous movement advancing from the edge of the stream upwards, and showing plainly

that some invisible creature was forcing its way through the thicket and into the path below me. I confess that my heart beat faster than usual. I did not at all like the idea of meeting a man in that dim copse at least a mile from home. I determined to ascertain, without showing myself, which way he was going, and allow him either to pass me or to outstrip me, as the case might be.

I drew back out of the path and hid myself among the rocks, crouching down upon the ground. It was easy to do this so effectually, that no one who was not actually looking for me should be likely to find me. A few minutes after I was thus ensconced, I saw a figure come out of the dark tree-shadows, and begin to climb the hill rapidly towards me. As he approached I felt strangely nervous, and asked myself what I should do if I were to see that he *was* looking for me—if he were to leave the path and come straight to the place where I was lying *perdue*.

He did not exactly do this, but he did the thing next to it. He stopped on the brow of the eminence within a few feet of me. His back was towards me, but I fancied that his figure was not unfamiliar. I could not fit the remembrance with a name, but kept saying to myself, "Where have I seen him before?" While I was vainly trying to answer the question, I suddenly perceived that he was not alone—there were two figures. Where the second comer had been concealed, and how he made his appearance, I could not say; but there he was in the moonlight—a tall, slight, swift-looking man, remarkably picturesque, and quite unknown to me. He threw his arm over the shoulder of the

first with a caressing movement, and they went away together up the side of the hill, passing close by my nest. As they passed, the features of the shorter man were for a moment visible to me as he looked up to his companion. That moment sufficed for recognition. It was my saucy friend the fisherman. He looked full of glee and eagerness; the other seemed grave and anxious; they talked together very rapidly and in a low voice, but I thought that they were not speaking English. At any rate, I did not succeed in catching one intelligible word, though I heard their voices.

When they were out of sight I resumed my way. I hardly knew what to think. There was nothing in the return of this boy which ought to awaken suspicion of any sort, yet I felt uneasy and full of conjectures. I scolded myself, and told myself that the seclusion, and the constant watching, and anxiety about Maude, had made me foolishly mistrustful. Why should not this walking tourist, sportsman, pleasure-seeker in any shape, come back to the place where he had enjoyed himself six months before? What could be more natural, if he had enjoyed it, than that he should bring a friend, or that both should indulge themselves with a moonlight ramble? Yet it *did* seem strange that this lonely place should be so visited during our retirement. And when I remembered the cluster of huts which formed the village of Clytha, I really could not conceive where the most hardy and simple-minded of tourists could contrive to find accommodation. "They must be lodging at the mill," thought I; "there is not another house in the whole place that would hold them." I resolved to walk to

the mill the next day, and find out from its inhabitants, with whom we were on good terms, whether any strangers were in the village.

In the copse I met Gwythyr, who told me he had come out to look for me, because it was growing so late. His manner was perfectly civil, yet it somehow impressed me uncomfortably with the idea that he thought that a walk so late and so solitary was very decidedly objectionable. I said a few words about the absolute security of the valley, and the extreme beauty of the night.

"Oh! safe enough, ma'am," he rejoined, "if you mean as to real danger; but there's sometimes strangers or tramps about, and ladies mostly don't like meeting strangers after dark. If they're friends, why, you know, the case is different."

The speech was an odd one, and after a moment's reflection, I asked him what he meant by it. As well try to hold an eel as a Welshman.

"Why, to say truth, ma'am," answered he, "I seed a feller this morning throwing a fly in the big pool, just beyond our marches; and I thought if he should chance to be dawdling about to-night, as he wasn't very likely to be an acquaintance of yours, he might skear you."

There was nothing to be said to this, so I merely thanked him and went in. I had made up my mind, I scarcely know why, not to tell Maude anything about my little adventure. I did not wait to light a candle, but ran quickly up-stairs into my bedroom, knowing that the moonlight would be pouring in at the window, and that I should have no difficulty in seeing how to put away my bonnet

and shawl, and make myself presentable before tea. Some one was in the room before me. Through the half-open door I saw a lighted candle standing on the table, and when I entered, I was not a little surprised by the discovery of Irvine, who was standing before my chest of drawers and apparently amusing herself by rummaging their contents!

She turned with a start when she heard my footstep. In her hand was the identical red silk handkerchief which had been thrown in at the garret window six months before.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said she, with admirable self-possession, though her speech was preceded by a kind of hysterical murmur, "but you was rather late in selecting and adjusting your things from the wash, and I thought perhaps it might be convenient if I was to put them away. Would you please to like this handkerchief washed, ma'am?—it has rather a forcible odour with it."

"Thank you, Irvine," said I, gravely, taking it from her; "I will not trouble you. I do not like any one to arrange my drawers but myself."

"Oh! of course not, ma'am—I hope I should not think of intervening unnecessarily. But there seemed rather a disturbance among the linen, ma'am, and so I took the liberty to make a few dispositions, if you didn't object."

I did not wait to hear any more apologies, but went down to Maude, secretly reproaching myself for not having locked up the obnoxious handkerchief.

XIII.—ONE VIEW OF THE PAST.

I was strangely tired with my twilight walk, and actually overslept myself the next morning. I was in bed when the post-bag was brought to me. It was, of course, too soon to expect an answer to my letter of inquiry, and I was a little surprised when I saw Mr. Langley's handwriting on an envelope directed to myself. I had become so accustomed to the clock-work regularity of his communications, that when one arrived out of its due course, I was quite prepared for some reason of special importance. I copy the letter.

"My dear Miss Derwent,—

"Several considerations induce me to think that it may be well now to acquaint you with certain particulars of our family history, with which it was useless to trouble you when I first had the pleasure of being introduced to you. I gather from your letters that you are obtaining just that influence over your pupil for which I hoped, but which I scarcely ventured to expect so soon. You may, therefore, probably—and I trust that you will—be admitted to her confidence. You may have it in your power to disabuse her mind of certain impressions which have had a most injurious effect upon it, or, at any rate, greatly to weaken them. And I think it very important that you should not yourself be misled or bewildered by the statements which she may make to you—statements which she, poor child, entirely believes—and which you would not know how to answer, unless you were in possession of the facts, though I have too much reliance upon your judgment to suppose that you would receive them without

question. I do not wish, however, to say more than is actually necessary; and this you will fully understand when you see the painful nature of some of the subjects to which I shall be compelled to allude."

When I came to this point in the letter my interest was thoroughly aroused. I rang the bell, sent for my breakfast, with a request for Maude not to wait for me, and settled myself to the perusal of a narrative of some length with a feeling of strong curiosity.

(*Mr. Langley's Letter, continued.*)

"My first marriage was not happy. I was dazzled, as many men have been, and will be, by the wonderful beauty and grace of a woman. I lost my head as well as my heart, and I suffered as I deserved, when, too late for reparation, I discovered my mistake. Maude is in person, and I fear in temperament, very like her mother, who was a young widow when I married her—with one infant—posthumous, scarcely two years older than Maude. I was deeply engaged in mercantile transactions and speculations, and, in pursuing these, had to make many excursions into the interior of the country, leaving my young wife at Rio. During the intervals which I spent with her I became aware that her education was defective, and her temper terribly excitable—we had many differences—and our reconciliations were neither full nor satisfactory. Doubtless I too was in fault. I am naturally *exigeant*, and in those days I had undergone but little discipline, and learned but few lessons in life. I had an idea that any man can conquer any woman by sheer force of will, and my tactics

were framed upon this supposition. I was worsted. One day, when I returned from a peculiarly successful expedition which had lasted several weeks—it was marvellous how uninterruptedly success attended all my trade speculations, as if to compensate for my domestic failures—I found my home deserted.

"There was plenty of scandal—when does it fail?—but no charge capable of proof, and I have never known how far I was wronged. My wife had gone to her own family, taking her children with her, and leaving a letter for me, in which she said that her life was so miserable that she had resolved to bear it no longer, and that nothing should induce her to return to me. I made no attempt to shake her resolution. I was bitterly angry, and in my first heat I said openly that she was not worth recalling, or something equivalent. This caused a quarrel with her brother, the only member of her family who was resident in Rio, and, as I shall always grieve to remember, it led to a duel. I need not, perhaps, have confessed this to you, but it seemed scarcely honest to leave it out of my narrative. It is the saddest incident of my life. He was badly hurt, and though he did not die of his wound at the time, he never recovered it, and died within the year. I have hardly, I think, conveyed to you an idea of the amount of my provocation—indeed, it seems ungenerous to dwell upon it now. But though I blamed, and shall ever continue to blame myself, I was not blamed by those who knew all the particulars of the occurrence. It is due to myself to say thus much. But the breach with my wife and her family was rendered irremediable. The peace of my solitary fireside

was dearly purchased. I took refuge from the pain of my thoughts in hard, incessant, eager labour. As the first keen irritation died away, vague hopes that I might some day reclaim my child, or even, possibly, my wife herself, presented themselves from time to time. But I did not dwell upon them. The care of a young child would have been impossible to me in the life I was then leading; and indignant as I was, I would not have compelled the mother to part from her little one, even if I could.

"My wife's fortune, which was considerable, had been all invested in the business in which I was engaged. It would have been highly inexpedient to withdraw it. I offered an allowance which I considered equivalent. It was indignantly refused. A lawsuit was threatened, but it was never commenced. It would only have been disastrous to my opponents.

"When my anger softened, which it did in process of time—for though I see much to regret and condemn in my behaviour during that unhappy period of my life, I cannot accuse myself of having been vindictive—I tried to open direct communication with my wife, and failed. I learned that she was at Buenos Ayres with a married sister—she afterwards went to Montevideo. Her family were all staunch republicans—another cause of disunion between them and myself—her sister had married an Italian refugee. The country was disturbed and full of warfare; communication became at first difficult, then impossible; I lost sight of them entirely. It is perhaps hardly possible for you to conceive the difference of habits between life in those wild, irregular, half-civilized regions, and in *secure*, polished, peaceable England. Men accommodate

themselves unconsciously to the modes of living which are forced upon them; anxieties and uncertainties which would be intolerable at one place and time become natural at another. It is a law of our being, and it is well that it should be so. A bomb bursting in the midst of a fashionable London dinner party would not do more mischief than one of the numbers which used to burst daily within the walls of Lucknow, but it would assuredly produce a far more appalling impression.

"It was not till 1856, four years ago, that I was able to make an expedition in person in search of my child. My wife had been dead some years. I was married again, and I now knew what domestic happiness was. The present Mrs. Langley, who was acquainted with my unhappy story, often urged me to reclaim my daughter from the care of her mother's family, and I made several attempts, but all in vain. She had reached an age at which I had a right to demand her, but I did not like to press my right. The death of the woman I had once passionately loved destroyed all bitterness; I felt grateful to those who had ministered to her last years; I was unwilling to inflict a fresh pang upon them. I thought I could do no more than express my readiness and desire to receive the child if they would restore her to me. When, however, the time arrived at which it became desirable that I should settle in England, and superintend personally certain new investments of the large fortune which I had gradually realised, I determined to make a last effort, and I went to Montevideo myself.

"I need not trouble you with the details of my difficul-

ties in tracing those of whom I was in search. I will only give you the results. I found that my wife had died at an estancia (country farmhouse) belonging to her brother-in-law, some miles from Montevideo. I sought out the place; it was empty. I ascertained from the person in charge of it, that its late tenants had left South America for Italy some months before. A wild-looking place it was for the home of a young English lady, and strange enough were the particulars which I gathered of my daughter's childhood. Rossetti, my wife's brother-in-law, was one of Garibaldi's desperadoes, and had followed his master to Italy in 1847 when the first Roman Revolution broke out. His son, a mere child then, was badly wounded at the defence of Montevideo; he remained with his mother and the two little girls. Here and thus Maude grew up, tending horses and cattle, the chief riches of the country, like a common farm-servant; fetching and carrying, spinning and digging, or paddling about in a boat on one of the lagunes not far from the house, when Marco Rossetti was well enough to take charge of her. She may have learned her letters—she certainly learned nothing more—except to catch, saddle, and mount a half-tamed horse of the prairies without assistance, and scour away for miles when she had nothing better to do, The principles which she imbibed from her young scamp of a cousin, or from the occasional guests who asked hospitality, or fugitives who sought concealment, at the estancia, were such as you may imagine. She learned to despise authority in every shape, but never so completely as when it came to her backed by the hated name of her father. I

cannot forgive Madame Rossetti for the manner in which she poisoned my child's mind against me; I cannot persuade myself that any amount of self-deception could excuse her for it.

"Well, to shorten a long story, Rossetti's son was impatient to join him, but it was long before he was able, and when he had quite recovered his strength, his father reappeared at Montevideo. The Italian revolution had failed, at least as far as their hopes were concerned, for they are Sicilians. After a time, however, storms began to brew again, and the unquiet spirits determined to be ready for the next outbreak. So they all went back to Italy together, travelling under an *alias*, like disguised princes, for the name of Rossetti was proscribed. I could not learn what name they adopted, nor to what part of Italy they betook themselves. The chief part of my information was obtained at the estancia itself; for when I began to make inquiries in Montevideo I encountered everywhere the closest reserve. In one or two instances I have discovered that I was misled by purposely false information. Lying and plotting are the curses of revolutionary society; they become second nature, and a man will tell you a lie for mere practice, lest he should make a mistake and relapse into the bad habit of truth-telling.

"As soon as I could make time after my return to England I went in search of my lost sheep. I fancied that I had traced them to Sicily (you remember seeing some of the sketches with which I amused myself during my wanderings), but it was a false scent. My first voyage of inquiry was fruitless; it is little more than a year since

I found them and brought Maude home. The aunt was dead; the children were living with some peasants, formerly in the service of the Rossetti family. Old Rossetti was dead also; Marco, the son whom I mentioned to you before, considered himself the guardian of the two girls, and disposed of them at his pleasure. Luckily he was away when I lighted upon them; he was helping his chief to organise Chasseurs des Alpes for the last campaign. He is a mere bravo, with the morals and education of a pirate; he would have used his stiletto without scruple if I had given him a chance. I had little difficulty in getting possession of my daughter. I knew something of the laws of the country, and as soon as I had satisfied myself that I had really run down my game, I armed myself with the necessary authority before I showed my face. Resistance was useless. I would gladly have brought the elder girl away with me, for her own sake, though I could not have established a legal claim upon her, but the poor child was dangerously ill of fever, and died the day after my departure.

"Since then I have had nothing but trouble and difficulty with Maude, but I have felt, as I am sure you feel, that there can be no bounds to the indulgence with which one ought to judge a creature whose early years have been so handled. In spite of my utmost vigilance, her cousin contrived for a time to keep up intercourse with her. I felt that this *must* be stopped at all hazards, and I have succeeded, I believe, in stopping it. I must not forget to tell you that he claimed her in a most insolent letter, calling her his ward, and demanding

that she should be given up to him. His audacity fairly puzzled me at first, till I discovered the stratagem to which he has had recourse, and which certainly is ingenious. He affirms that it was the younger girl who died, and that Maude is my wife's daughter by her first marriage, and he claims her, not only as next of kin, but by virtue of a clause in her grandfather's will, which names him as trustee and guardian to Lucia, the elder girl. A considerable sum of money was left to be divided between the two children, or to come entire to the survivor. This is, of course, Marco's object. Whether he has really persuaded poor Maude out of her own identity I cannot tell; pertinacity and untruthfulness are two of the evils attendant upon half-savage life, and I have no doubt that she will adhere to his statement, though it is hardly possible to suppose, even with her bewildered and undeveloped mind, that she believes it. At first I thought she was in love with him; a ruffian may pass for a hero to a girl like her, if only he softens his voice and hides his revolver; and as the acquaintance is of long date, I thought I might possibly have a real attachment to contend against. But though I am no great proficient in reading the hearts of young ladies, I am pretty sure that I have read Maude's enough to know that there is no special danger to it from Rossetti. Her passions are for liberty and admiration, and she is to be won by any man who will gratify them. The poor child does not understand herself, but you could not be ten minutes in the room with her and any man who should make his admiration apparent, without understanding her. I hope that she will be safely and happily married before

Rossetti renews his attempts. I have made arrangements with this view, and I am *sure* of success unless anything very untoward intervenes. In the hands of a judicious, kind, well-principled man, the work which you have so well begun will be finished, and I confidently expect to see this poor misguided girl a happy and respectful wife and mother. I am sure there is good material in her. Seclusion, and your kind and wise training, have given her time and opportunity for improvement; irritation has subsided; better thoughts have risen. I have studied her deeply, and I am sure that in her present state a month's courtship will make her think herself the happiest of created beings, only we must be careful not to alarm her, and above all not to let her suspect that her lover is my choice. Business has summoned me away for a few days, but I hope shortly to make my appearance at Parc Rhaiader with a very acceptable companion; and I am sure that you will second me in my endeavours to secure Maude's happiness. I am ashamed of the length of this letter, but I think that I could not really have explained the position of affairs to you in fewer words. I will only add, that I am most sincerely yours,

"Everard Langley."

I read the letter twice, and then said to myself, "The case is clear, and my duty also is clear." I said this to myself deliberately and with a will; it was not the spontaneous decision of my heart. Great uneasiness, haunting and extravagant doubts, strong inclinations to sympathize with what reason and judgment told me was the wrong

side, perplexed me. I would not allow myself to listen to them. Sympathy with Maude was not, however, forbidden to me; and when I saw how tenderly and considerately her father wrote of her, I felt that I should wrong him deeply were I to doubt his sympathy. I went through the narrative of his letter, noting the incidents only as bare facts, and considering how easily they might be presented to Maude in the darkest and most repulsive colours. A wife so miserable that she forsook her husband, not moved by guilty pasison, but in order to take refuge with her own family; a murderous duel; a fortune retained on questionable grounds; a child abandoned, and only reclaimed (so it might have been represented to Maude) when money was to be made by her; management by a system of intrigue and manœuvre, which was devised in order to lead up to a marriage planned without reference to the feeling of the parties concerned—this was one aspect of the history. And when I had brought this aspect well before my mind, I could not but own that it was exceedingly uncomfortable and suspicious. I set myself, however, to balance it by a fair counter-statement. A marriage, the work of youthful passion, resulting in bitter disappointment; a deserted husband, wronged more deeply than he cared to inquire; outraged, wounded, yet after a time of natural anger ready to forgive, and baffled in all his efforts to reclaim his wife; a generous offer rejected with scorn; a father robbed of his child for years, and recovering her only to find that her heart had been poisoned against him—surely Mr. Langley was indeed a man to be pitied. Who could wonder, moreover, that a

wealthy, civilized, polished English gentleman was ready to move heaven and earth to save his daughter from becoming the prey of a reckless foreign adventurer—a man "with the morals and education of a pirate"? It was perhaps natural that an early marriage should suggest itself to him as the best means of saving her, and if he had read Maude's temperament correctly he was probably in the right.

In both narratives there remained the difficult question of identity—which was which of the two sisters. This puzzled me. I could not bring myself to look upon either party as deceived or deceiver. I could not understand it. To attribute fraud to Mr. Langley here was, of course, to pronounce him in a word the blackest of villains. Six months' intimacy with Maude led me to think her, with all her faults, quite incapable of deliberate deception. Yet I did not see how it was possible that either she or Mr. Langley should in this case assert a falsehood, believing it to be true. No amount of thinking brought me to a clearer view of the matter. I was obliged to put it aside and reserve my judgment. But it would not be put aside, and my judgment refused to reserve itself. The question was constantly thrusting itself before me, and I found myself constantly engaged in passing opposite sentences. Unprofitable and harassing employment! The two views presented by Mr. Langley's letter seemed really to persecute me. I was quite glad to escape from the solitude of my room, and to divert, or rather, perhaps, to develop, my thoughts by a walk with Maude.

XIV.—ANOTHER VIEW.

"Maude," said I, as we walked to the mill together, "what was the name of your sister, I mean the sister who died in Italy?"

"I believe her real name was Gertrude," replied she, "but she was always called Lilia."

I looked my surprise. Maude explained.

"My real name, you know, is Lucia, but I have always been called Maude, and I should hardly know myself under my real name. We have been hiding ever since I can remember anything, and we always went by feigned names."

"But why by feigned names before you went to Italy?"

"Because my mother and my aunt were so afraid that Mr. Langley would trace us. They had recourse to all sorts of devices. I have been told that when we were at Buenos Ayres, and Gertrude and I were quite little, we were dressed like boys, and we passed for the children of my aunt Rossetti. But that is too far off for me to remember."

"It seems strange that they should call you by an English name," observed I.

"It was my aunt's name," she replied; "my aunt and my mother were English, though one married a Portuguese and the other an Italian. I am glad that I have English blood in me, Miss Derwent."

"Was it a great grief when your sister died?"

"Oh, think of it!" she replied, clasping her hands together in her expressive way; "don't speak of it! Never

once parted till then—and then—you know, you know—not even suffered to see her die!"

"Was she like you?" Be it noted that I felt myself hard of heart for persisting in this conversation; yet I was so anxious to draw Maude out on the subject, that I could not make up my mind to desist.

"They said we might pass for twins," answered she, looking on the ground; "only she was prettier. She was like me all but the eyes, and when you looked quite into her eyes you found out they were—oh, so blue! And she was much better than I am. She was always quite gentle."

"And her father left her and took you away?" said I, in a tone which sufficiently expressed how much it puzzled me that he should have done so.

"When he first came," she replied, "he claimed us both. He said we were both his children. He left her because she was too ill to be moved. Then afterwards, when he was trying to deceive me, he told me that she was not really his child, but that he had claimed her because he wanted to extricate us both from what he called misery and wickedness. Oh, what despair I was in while I believed I was really his daughter!"

"You believed it?" exclaimed I; "how could that be if it was not so?"

"I knew nothing," she said, "I never heard his name till the day on which he came to take us away from dear Monna Giulia, with whom we were so happy. I believe" (lowering her voice) "my mother had asked before she died that we were never to be told anything. We never asked

questions—why should we? we were happy and free, and we wanted to know no more. I think my aunt would have told us if it had depended on her. I look back, and am sure that she felt such anger about her sister's wrongs, that she would have wished to teach us to hate him. But she always did what her husband wished, and he had, oh! such a gentle, generous heart! There is only one other heart like it. I look back a long, long way, and remember my aunt one morning, flushed and angry, going to him with an open letter. I remember they read it together, and she said, 'Those children ought to know—at least when they are older.' 'No, no,' he said—the words stayed with me though I did not understand them—'never put bitterness into a child's or a woman's heart.' He saw me looking up from my play and listening, because I knew they were talking about us, and he called me to him and put his hand upon my head. 'Maude,' said he, 'don't you often boast that Uncle Rossetti is a brave soldier?'—'Yes,' cried I, 'and you *are* a brave soldier—everybody says so—don't say you are not!'—'I am,' he replied, smiling, 'and I like you to know it. I have been in thirteen battles, and I have eleven wounds—' 'Yes,' I interrupted him; 'and you nearly died so many times, and there is that great scar on your forehead which I always kiss when I say good-night.' He lifted me on his knee, and placed my hand on the scar; 'There it is,' he said, 'the old friend! Now I want you all your life long, when you remember that scar and the others, and when you feel so proud that Uncle Rossetti was brave, to remember what Uncle Rossetti says to you now. And this is what he says to you—Keep your heart gentle!'"

She stopped short. She had told this history in a low, murmuring voice, with eyes fixed and filling with tears, as if she saw before her the picture which memory was calling up. As she paused, she turned to me and added suddenly—

"I know what you are thinking!"

"What do you suppose I am thinking?"

"You are wondering that, if I was so trained, I should have grown up so—so—*un*-gentle. But, indeed, I wasn't so while I was with them. I had always a violent temper; they knew that, and they used to allow for it, and I think I should have conquered it at last. But I have been driven mad since I was taken away from them. And then, too, you must remember, Uncle Rossetti was so little with us. It was only now and then I had those sweet lessons. And Aunt Maude was very different. I loved her, and she was good to me, but I never thought she was gentle. I think women sometimes grow fierce just because they are not able to act—it is so terrible to be helpless."

"But if you believed yourself to be Mr. Langley's daughter," said I, steadily pursuing the matter-of-fact line of my investigations through the bewildering play of light and colour in which her memories entangled it, "what caused you to think—to discover that you are not?"

"Marco told me," said she, looking down.

The whole thing was clear to me now. This worthless adventurer had imposed upon her. All tallied with Mr. Langley's statements. After he had brought her away, this Marco had contrived for a time to establish a communication with her, and she, naturally enough, had accepted with unquestioning faith whatever he told her. She had

been miserable, rebellious, violent. They had attempted to control her by manœuvres and intrigues, having failed in the attempt to do so by direct authority. I pitied them all. I remembered my first sight of Maude; I recalled her face and her attitude as she sat in the window while I was making acquaintance with her younger sister, and I thought how entirely they expressed the angry, helpless despair which she must have felt. I transferred her in fancy from that London drawing-room and those incessant restraints to the back of a wild horse of the prairies, or to the shores of some Italian lake in the warm, transparent evening-time, with Marco by her side; and I almost wondered that she had preserved her reason. But what hope was there for the future? Little enough. Since I had heard her history my hopes had greatly diminished. She might be saved—in fact, she must be saved—from the utter ruin of an alliance with the reckless criminal who was pursuing her, and who, if he could be kept aloof for a little while, would probably spare us any further trouble by finishing his own career in some appropriate and satisfactory manner. But how was she to live the only life possible for her, and be either good or happy in it?

There was only one course for me to pursue. I must try to win her confidence more fully, and to wean her from the worship of her false god, and I must labour to bring about a better understanding between her father and herself. I thought that I would advise him to open his heart to her. It might produce a great effect on her generous nature to be told the history of his early trials, and of her mother's misconduct. Following out the first part of my scheme, I

began to encourage her to talk to me about Marco, that I might put in here and there a qualifying or questioning word. It was much like throwing tiny pebbles into the "arrowy Rhône" with the hope of stopping its course. Maude was in a soft mood that morning; the remembrances on which she had been dwelling touched her; the indomitable reserve was not indeed conquered, but it was asleep for a little while, and she did not resist my efforts to draw her into conversation on the one subject hitherto so carefully avoided. She spoke with deep blushes, with averted face, with quickened breath, but still she spoke.

"Yes; he was wounded when he was quite a boy, at Montevideo, and had to be left behind when his father went to Italy. He was three years recovering. I was a little child, and used to play about his room, and fancy that I was helping to nurse him. Then when he began to get out of doors, he was still not strong, and I used to lead him about —and then he grew quite strong, and he used to play with me and teach me. Do you know how he was wounded? Then I'll tell you."

She stopped a moment, and then went on again, with heightened colour and heaving breast.

"They had made a sally, and they were returning, when he looked back and saw one of his comrades—a boy as young as himself—who had fallen by the way, shot through the leg. He did not hesitate a moment; he ran back to fetch him, under the enemy's fire, almost into his lines. He brought the poor boy in on his back, and then dropped. They thought he was dead."

"Did he tell you that story himself?" asked I.

"He!" cried she, turning to me in boundless astonishment. "He would never speak of anything he did himself! All the Italian legion knew it and talked of it!"

My next attempt was not more successful.

"I suppose," said I, "Marco grew up with as few advantages as yourself. I suppose he had no education."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "he was not like me; his father taught him, and he loved study. He knew mathematics and languages, and a great deal more. He used to teach me a little sometimes. Ah!" (coming close to my side) "how I wish you knew him! I cannot show you what he is—so gentle, so noble, and with *no* faults! Going from him to them was like going out of the pure fresh air of the mountains into a London theatre to breathe gas and smoke. You do not know what it makes of a man to live the life he lived, having no self in it, but always working and always ready to die for his country and his people. Patriots are always gentle."

She said the last words with a quiet air of decision, as if she were acquainting me with a fact in natural history. I had not taken much by my motion, certainly.

We had reached Clytha, and I was glad to sit down and rest at the mill. I was tired, and for the first time in my life I felt a little faint. Maude was eager in her care of me, and tried almost to force the people of the house to acknowledge that they had a pony or a donkey which would carry me home. The bustle attendant upon my slight indisposition put the thought of the question I had come to ask out of my head for the moment, but before I went away I remembered it.

"Have you any lodgers, Mrs. Prichard?" asked I.

"Lodgers, ma'am? No surely—did you hear I had?" was her surprised answer.

"No; but I saw a lad in the valley the other evening, who seemed to be out on a fishing or shooting excursion, and I was wondering where he could lodge."

"Likely, ma'am, he's with Colonel Seyton's new game-keeper. I know there's a young boy with him, and a saucy tongue he has. Well, it's a wonder to me how they spends their whole day in killing live things for fun, and then goes home at night and thinks themselves Christians."

"It's nature," said I, smiling.

"Men's nature, it is," she answered; "women 'ud scorn it. There's that old Gwythyr—I ask your pardon for making an example of him, since he belongs to you, but an example he is—he's never comfortable except when he's putting something to death, or tellin' how he did it. That's the way with sportsmen: when they can't kill, they likes to talk about killin'. And yet, if you was to even them to butchers, they'd think you was insultin' em!"

"Well—there is a little difference—"

"Much the difference that there is between soldiers and murderers," interrupted she; "the first does it for duty, and for earnin' of their livelihood, and the last does it because they likes it."

A shout of laughter responded to this sentiment, and the face of my friend, the young fisherman, was thrust in at the window.

"Bravo!—that's right—say it again—!" cried he.

"If I was to say it twenty times a day it wouldn't be no

use to you, nor no comfort to me, 'cep'n the minute's relief," retorted she. "Wastin' good words on such as you is like wastin' pence on a downright pauper—they just goes as they comes, and *he* comes to the work'us in spite of 'em."

The person addressed—I am still without a name for him—walked into the room while she was speaking, and deliberately seated himself in the middle of the floor. Mrs. Prichard, who was the only inhabitant of the valley sufficiently civilised to speak English, was a thoroughly good-hearted woman. Her ruling passion was a love of animals; and the tribe of halt, blind, and sickly which she had assembled around her, and taught gradually to live together in harmony, might really have constituted a "happy family." There was a blind raven and a lame partridge (saved with difficulty from Colonel Seyton and his dogs), a hedgehog, a squirrel, several worn-out dogs, and cats without number. Two of the latter animals, who had been reposing before the fire in profound peace and comfort, undisturbed by our presence, gathered themselves up on the entrance of the new comer, and after regarding him with that expression of unearthly malevolence proper to the eyes of cats, set up their backs, uttered several prolonged miauls, which sounded as if the whole of their internal machinery was coming to pieces, and sneaked off into corners, disdaining their enemy's attempts to coax them into a temporary truce.

"Look at that, now," cried Mrs. Prichard, contemplating her cats with sincere admiration. "Did you ever see such knowledge? And after that, people 'll venture to say

man's the cleverest of creatures! Why, *any* fool can take a *man* in, by getting up early and speaking a little soft—but Solomon hisself couldn't take in a cat! They knows—they knows; you may coax 'em till you're half choked, but you'll not get so much as a smile out of 'em."

"It's only your cats that are so hard-hearted," replied the boy; "I believe you don't give them enough to eat, and that spoils their tempers."

"Not enough to eat!" cried she, in shrill amazement; "you may live to be thankful for their leavin's! Why, them cats thinks they're the head of all things. Not another beast in the house gets drop or bit till they are satisfied—they'll be sittin' down to table afore me, who's better than a mother to 'em, next, I do believe."

"You should teach them better manners, Mrs. Prichard," said her tormentor; "you are letting them grow up round you like so many bears, and, take my word for it, they'll wring your maternal heart some day."

"A fine authority you are upon manners!" retorted she; "sitting down in the presence of ladies with your hat on. Talk of cats! Even the hedgehog 'ud be above that."

He sprang to his feet, and for the first time became aware of our presence. Apologies ensued, and were followed on his part by such a very prompt and determined attempt to improve his acquaintance with Maude, that I was bound to cut it short at once. Though still feeling languid and tired, I insisted upon taking leave of Mrs. Prichard and setting off for Parc Rhaiader without delay. I could not, however, prevent our young friend from escorting us, but I made myself so conspicuously ungracious that he was

disheartened, and wished us good-bye at the end of the first mile.

XV.—COME.

What a night I passed! I believed that Mrs. Prichard's menagerie was transferred to my bedroom, and that it was necessary for me to lie in one fixed and particularly uncomfortable position, in order to secure myself from having my eyes picked out by the partridge. I thought that the young stranger was sitting at the foot of my bed, fishing, and that every time he threw his line I was in danger of being hooked. I saw Gwythyr busily employed in tuning a piano, till he was interrupted by Mr. Langley, who addressed me with the utmost indignation, and inquired how I dared to tolerate such a proceeding in the house of Maude. "Do you know," he asked furiously, "that Gwythyr is nothing better than an Italian patriot after all?" Over and over again I repeated to myself the words, "nothing better than an Italian patriot," till at last I became dimly conscious that I was saying them aloud, and that Maude was stooping over me with a startled face. Daylight came, and I knew that I had had a sharp attack of fever in the night; I was exhausted and my limbs ached, but my head was clear, and I hoped that the worst was over. Of course I did not attempt to get up; indeed, I felt sick and giddy if I only lifted my head from the pillow. I managed, however, to read and understand my letters when the post-bag arrived. It contained, as I expected, a letter from Mrs. Langley to me, but I was a little surprised when I found in the envelope that same suspicious-looking

foreign epistle which I had sent up for inspection, and which was now returned to me. These were the instructions conveyed to me in Mrs. Langley's minute sloping characters, with the longest tails and heads that ever were attached to human handwriting:—

"DEAR MISS DERWENT,—

"In Mr. Langley's absence, I avail myself of the opportunity of your kind letter by informing you that you are perfectly at liberty to prosecute your acquaintance with Colonel and Mrs. Seyton, who are in every way desirable associates in birth and position: and the difficulties being happily at an end concerning Miss Langley—at least as far as regards external temptations, as you will perceive by the enclosed letter—I doubt not that you will be so kind as to transfer this letter to Miss Langley, and I hope that she will bear it in a right spirit; no greater comfort, I am sure, can be derived for her than she will enjoy from your presence and sympathy in her trial. Mr. Langley will, I am sure, communicate with you very shortly, with much pleasure in the new arrangements, and will probably result in your returning with Miss Langley to the bosom of her family at an earlier period than we agreed upon, from not anticipating what has occurred. My daughter Bertha unites in all that is kind; and hoping that you have escaped colds this severe weather, with our love to Maude, believe me very sincerely yours,

"AGATHA LANGLEY."

I could not help thinking, as I finished this document, that there was something in common between Mrs.

Langley and the refined Irvine, and the idea recurred which had often crossed my mind of late, that Maude had certainly not fallen into good hands. I turned with interest to the enclosure. I felt that I ought not to read it before giving it to Maude, but the terms in which it was mentioned in Mrs. Langley's letter irresistibly impelled me to do so. If this poor girl, for whom I now felt a degree of interest, pity, and affection which I can scarcely describe, was to receive some great shock, to endure some severe trial, as Mrs. Langley's words seemed to imply, it was important that I should know what she was about to suffer. She might shut herself up again in that armour of reserve which had so long resisted me and so slowly given way; she might relapse into a hopelessly morbid state of feeling. I thought that I had now considerable influence over her, and I could not feel that I should be justified in depriving myself of the chance of consoling and supporting her in her trouble, and perhaps guiding her sorrow into a healthy channel. So I read the note—not without scruples of conscience—yet convinced that on the whole I was doing right. It was very brief:—

"I am to go, *diletta mia*, as I told you. *Addio, addio!* perhaps not to meet again, certainly not for a year. I do not know if I can write; I am afraid not. I can only say *addio!* Do not forget me. Sometimes think of that last happy evening in the little alcove by the river; do you remember what happened at five o'clock? I shall never forget it.

"Yours till death,

"MARCO."

I was spared any long hesitation as to the best mode of breaking this farewell to Maude. She came to my bedside just as I finished reading it, and asked anxiously whether her letter had been sent back to her.

"Oh, yes, I see it has! it is in your hand. Give it me, give it me! don't make me wait. Oh! friend, was it right in you to read it first?"

Such an accent of reproach in these last words, as if she had expected better things of me! "Dear Maude," said I, still withholding it, "I had no right, I confess; but forgive me; I only read it because I knew it was to give you pain, and I want to help you to bear the pain if I can."

"No pain comes for me from that hand," answered she, taking the letter from me and kissing the words before she read them. I watched her in the greatest anxiety, but her face was impenetrable. I, at least, could read nothing in it but eagerness to comprehend. She did not give me much opportunity for studying her countenance. She thrust the paper into her bosom as soon as she had read it, and ran out of the room. In a quarter of an hour she returned, kissed me, said hurriedly, "Don't let us talk about it, please," and proposed to read to me. I thought it best to follow her lead in the first instance. If I should perceive that she was putting too violent a constraint upon herself, I could easily break it down. It is my principle to allow those who are in sorrow to choose their own mode of bearing it as freely as possible. If people have a right to anything in this world, surely they have a right to the exercise of undisturbed dominion over their own griefs.

So I set myself to watch Maude as closely as my aching

head permitted; not opposing her, but resolving to try to lead her gently into another path if she seemed to be going wrong. But never was a woman more thoroughly baffled than I during that weary day. She nursed me with the most endearing tenderness, scarcely leaving me for a moment; devising a thousand plans for my amusement or relief, trying to tempt me with delicacies of food, which I obstinately rejected; or of drink, which I eagerly welcomed; and, above all, showing to me in every look, tone, and gesture, that quick instinct of sympathy which I have mentioned as one of her gifts, and which makes every service a delight to those who receive as well as to those who pay it. But whether she read, or spoke, or was silent; whether she sat beside me, or moved away from me; in all the details of her attendance upon me, in every occupation, in every attitude, her downcast eyes seemed to me to be dancing with suppressed delight, her lips to be restraining or concealing a smile. I almost fancied that my own feverishness deceived me, and that I was imagining what I did not see. I raised myself on my elbow to look at her, but she turned away her face. Not once did she meet my eyes fully and fairly. She seemed restless, but evidently controlled herself, lest she should disturb me. Two or three times she came to my bedside suddenly, as if she were about to speak, and, in the very act of unclosing her lips, impressed me irresistibly with the idea that she was *not* saying that which she had come to say, but something else substituted for it at the moment; and always there was that subdued brightness in her face—that strange, mysterious expression. More and more I became

convinced, as the day passed on, that it was *not* painful excitement, that it was *not* strenuous effort; but that it was, as I had thought before, when the letter first arrived —*hope*—intense, expectant, confident hope. I told myself that I was not fully in possession of my faculties of observation; that I was deceiving and bewildering myself; but in vain. The conviction forced itself upon me with increasing strength, that she was not suffering, and that something, I could not guess what, was about to happen.

As twilight fell she left me for a few minutes, saying something about tea which I did not perfectly hear. She came back with her hat and shawl on, stopped for one second at the foot of my bed, did not look at me, but said rapidly, "Forgive me; I can't deceive you while you are ill; I am going to him now;" and ran out of the room with the speed of a chased hare before I had time to gather the meaning of her words.

I was ready to faint. What could I do? Where was she gone? I stretched my hand towards the bell, but it was beyond my reach. I tried to control my emotion, mental and bodily, and to get mastery over myself; not to tremble, not to gasp for breath, not to let my head throb and swim in this distracting manner; but to be calm, to understand what had happened, and what must now be done. The clock struck five. What was it that I had heard about five o'clock this very day? It came upon me then. Five o'clock was the hour named in Marco's note; the hour of their last meeting, to be remembered for ever. It was a *ruse* preconcerted with Maude, and understood by her. Five o'clock, and the little alcove by the river side!

I knew that little alcove well. Maude and I often sat there. It was a most secluded place; not visible from any part of our own grounds, though it might be seen from the other side of the river. It was down among the rocks, approachable only by a steep winding path, partly cut into steps, which descended from the garden to the river's edge, and after proceeding for two or three hundred yards, almost on a level with the water, suddenly mounted again and brought you to the entrance of a little nest some twenty feet higher up, arched and guarded by natural blocks of stone, wreathed with moss and ivy, and having just standing ground enough in front of it to allow you to enter without inconvenience. The view from the seat within was a lovely vignette of rock, wood, and water, backed by the precipitous rise of the opposite hill. I saw the place before me, and felt, with a sinking of the heart, that they were there together, at this very moment. I gathered up my quivering limbs, and with difficulty got out of bed; but when I was about to ring, I checked myself. *Could* I loose Irvine upon them? *Could* I expose and disgrace Maude, and undo in a moment the work and the hope of six months? No, it was impossible. If I had strength enough to leave my bed, I had, or I must compel myself to have, strength to do more. It was my post, my charge, my duty, to protect Maude, and I must neither abandon it nor delegate it to another. I must follow her myself.

I began to dress as quickly as I could. Shall I ever forget the horrors of that toilette—the unspeakable weariness and painfulness of it? I was in such a state of body

that I could not move a finger without making my head swim: merely to stand or sit still was distressing to me in the extreme; looking steadily at any object brought a sense of torment to me. The successive efforts which I had to make in order to collect and put on my clothes seemed more than I could bear. Several times I sat or sank down upon the ground with a feeling that I *could* do no more, and then lashed myself into action again by the thought of what I *must* do. Once I longed so intensely to get back into bed and plunge my head into the pillow, that I really thought the longing would conquer me. Somehow, nevertheless—and with extraordinary quickness too—I did succeed in dressing myself; and by the time the operation was over, strong excitement had overpowered physical distress and languor, and though my head throbbed violently, and my limbs were unsteady, I was able to support myself, and I walked downstairs, with suffering, certainly, but with very little difficulty.

I was afraid of awakening suspicion in the servants, so I determined to go through the drawing-room into the garden—if I had gone out at the house-door I must have passed the windows of their sitting-room, where they were probably all assembling for tea at that moment. The drawing-room door stood half open. I looked cautiously in, and saw the housemaid sweeping up the ashes on the hearth and putting candles ready to be lighted on the table, before she went away to her companions. She looked towards the windows, as if doubting whether she should close shutters and draw curtains at once, but there was still that pleasant half-light from the sky which we were in the

habit of enjoying to the last, so she merely gave a few finishing touches to the chairs and table-ornaments, and came out of the room humming a low song to herself. I drew back into the darkest corner of the hall, where there were some cloaks hanging up, and happily escaped observation as she passed. This momentary pause reminded me that I was hardly enough wrapped up to encounter the evening air, so as soon as the door of the servants' parlour was fairly closed behind her, I took down a cloak, and covered myself with it as warmly as I could. Then I went quickly through the drawing-room, opened the window—hardly thinking of my own physical condition till the difficulty which I found in undoing the bolt reminded me how unsteady my hands were—and stepped out upon the lawn, feeling the grass cold against my feet, though the freshness of the perfectly motionless air upon my face seemed rather to revive than chill me.

XVI.—MET.

I have already described the position of Parc Rhaiader house. It stood on a natural terrace, which was laid out in lawn and flower beds, and from the edge of which the ground everywhere sank abruptly till it reached the banks of the river. Rocks and woods covered the sides of this precipitous slope. The entrance to the path which I was now going to descend lay so far to the right of the drawing-room front, that, as the valley curved round the elevation on which the house stood, this entrance was not visible from the windows themselves. The path was among rocks, and as I said before, was very steep and partly cut into

steps. The woods of Parc Rhaiader lay to the left, where the valley widened; the first descent into them was also very steep, and many blocks and miniature precipices of moss-grown rock were to be found among the stems of the trees; there was but little undergrowth, and though the woodland paths had been much neglected, the ground was, from its natural arrangement, capable of being traversed in almost every direction.

When I was far enough advanced across the lawn to see the opening among the rocks for which I was making, I came to a sudden pause. I was absolutely certain that I saw a figure move across the entrance to the path; I saw it only for a moment, but there was quite light enough to make me sure that I had seen it, and I scudded away in an opposite direction, fearing to be discovered myself, and resolving in a moment upon a change of tactics. One of two things was clear to me: either Gwythyr was on the watch, or Maude and her lover had provided themselves with a sentinel. Whether friend or foe was in the path, I was equally determined not to meet him. My anxiety to shield Maude from exposure was almost as strong as my determination to do my own duty by her, and prevent or recall her from any failure in hers. I felt sure that I could make my way through the woods and get into the path at a lower point. I ran round the house towards the left as fast as I could, till I was far enough to be able to cross the open ground unseen. I effected the crossing, keeping my face turned towards the path, and ascertaining that its entrance was not to be seen from any part of the ground which I now traversed. Once over the edge of the plat-

form and within the belt of trees, I kept as close to the outskirts of the wood as possible, till I had reached the nearest point to the path which I thought safe. Then I turned and struck downwards through the trees, keeping well to the right, and calculating that I should come out among the rocks about half-way down the descent, where more than one turning would separate me effectually from the top of the path. The wood was darker than I expected, but the way was not difficult, and I supported myself by the stems of the trees. Two or three times I had to diverge a little in order to avoid a clump of brushwood or a mass of stone, but I kept the general direction of my steps steadily before my mind, and made up for the ground which I was compelled to lose as quickly as possible. I found that there was a slight error in my calculations; and when I got fairly out among the rocks, I was much nearer the river's edge than I intended to be, and so much in proportion farther off from the path. This signified little, as I had now light to guide me. I made my way along the banks, stopping occasionally to take breath, but on the whole losing very little time. Strange to say, I had almost lost the sense of bodily distress which impeded me so greatly at first; anxiety and rapid exercise had fairly conquered it. The alcove faced the west, so that when I reached the foot of the ascent which led up to it, my way was bright with the glow which a recent sunset had left. As I came out of the deep shadow of the winding valley, it seemed to me that I was stepping into another world—a world of warmth, joy, and beauty, which I must not linger to enjoy. And the picture which I saw for one moment when I had

climbed the path and stood on the little platform before the alcove—for one moment only, before my presence destroyed it—accorded well with the scene.

There they were—the lovers! I had followed so quickly that they could not have been many minutes together, but a lifetime of union was in their eyes. She was close to his heart, his arm being clasped about her; at the moment of my arrival she was bending down her face, and kissing his hand with a gesture half passionate, half playful. I dared not stay to contemplate the tenderness with which he looked down upon her. But in that instant I received, without the power of resisting it, a sense of the strength of the bond between them, and the intensity of their happiness in each other, which nothing could afterwards destroy. I could not help seeing, too, that he was a fine, noble-looking man: his dark face was doubtless capable of expressing other passions less pure than that which now filled it, but at the moment it was beautiful as hers. When they saw me they started asunder, but this was her movement only; he immediately drew her back to him, with a flash of the eyes which looked a little dangerous.

"Maude, you must come with me directly," said I, panting for breath, as I leaned against the rocky side of the alcove; "you must indeed."

"But I don't think she will," answered Marco, quietly, letting go his grasp, and putting her gently from him. "See!" She went back to him like a child to its mother.

"Oh! Maude, my love!" I pleaded; "you know this is so wrong. How can you bear to treat me in this manner? I might have sent the others to bring you home, but I could

not bear to distress and expose you. Will you not come with me?"

There was conscious powerlessness in my accent of entreaty, for the silent Maude only looked up into her lover's face while I spoke to her, and I felt that I was nothing in the balance. She simply waited to know what he would do or say.

"Indeed, dear lady," said he, very gently, "it would have been better to send the others; it would have made no difference to me, and it would have saved you trouble and fatigue. You seem so tired; won't you rest?"

He made room for me on the seat as he spoke, with a grave courtesy that was almost comic. I sank down, for I really could not stand. My nervous agitation took the form of anger, and I addressed Maude vehemently:—

"Have you no shame—no principle? Is this modest? is it?—"

"Hush!" interrupted Marco, softly laying his hand upon my mouth, with another flash of his remarkable eyes; "she is not to be spoken to in that manner."

His voice was very low, and his manner very quiet, but I felt completely subdued.

"She is very kind and good, Marco," murmured Maude; "she means it all for kindness—I love her."

"Ah!" said he, in a deeper tone, and looking at me as if the words ennobled me at once in his eyes, "Listen, then. You think it kind and good to separate us. Some one has deceived you, and made you believe it to be your duty. Well, I won't argue; but I just tell that you can't do it. No one can do it. It is impossible, because we are one.

Do you not see that she is mine, and that I have her? and how can you fancy for a moment that I will let her go?"

I gathered breath and courage to answer him. "I don't know you," said I, "and I cannot tell what your views of duty are. Perhaps I shall appeal to you wrongly; but I must do what I can. Maude is not yours—she is her father's, and her father has given me charge of her. I am responsible for her to him. You are forcing me to fail in my duty. You don't know the misery you are causing. Oh, Maude, won't you have pity on me, if you have none on yourself?"

She turned her face to me for one moment, with a soft look in her eyes. "I am so sorry for you," she said, but she said it as if she saw no possible way of helping me.

"And I am sorry for you too," added he, as if he could not but sympathise in any feeling of hers; "but now you mus hear what *my* duty is. Will *you* say what it is, Lucia?" (When he spoke to her every syllable seemed a caress.) "No? Then I must. My duty is to *her*," and he put his arm a little farther round her as he spoke, as if to shelter her from the world. It is to take care of her; to protect her; to belong to her; to keep her; to serve her." At every pause he looked down upon her and seemed to wait for her sanction. Perhaps he read it in her face, for he went on, though she did not say a word. He spoke with the greatest possible softness and tenderness, and seemed to be talking to her, not to me. "Nobody has such a right to her as I have. I am of no use in the world, except to make her happy. Won't you say so, Lucia? Is it not true?"

"Those last words were not true," whispered she, hiding her face; "I am too proud of you to let you say that."

He smiled, and then looked at me again, and went on, changing suddenly to a tone of supplication. "She says you are good and kind to her, and that she loves you. Do not be cruel to her now. Ask yourself—*was* she happy? *was* she kindly treated? *did* they understand her? *did* they do well by her? What did you think of her when she came to you? What was she? Was she not sad—troubled—forsaken—almost driven mad? Remember her face! What did you read in it? Look at her now! She is so safe—so happy! If she loves you, I am sure you love her. Look at her; don't take her away from me!"

He poured out his entreaties with such passion that they seemed all to be uttered in a breath. I was helpless and ashamed before him.

"Will you promise," stammered I, "not to try to see her again till I have written to her father?"

"Why in the world should I promise that?" asked he, composedly. And when I came to think of it, I could not tell why he should.

"But what do you intend to do?" inquired I, feeling in my blank bewilderment that it could not rest here; "you must have some object and some purpose. You cannot take her away before my eyes." (While I said these words, I felt inwardly that he could if he liked.) "You have led her into deception and rebellion; what do you expect to gain by it?"

"Not deception," said Maude, reproachfully; "I told you I was going."

Marco half laughed. "I know you told her," said he, with an accent that showed plainly enough how much he wished that she had been less explicit.

"Of what use was it to tell me if I am to have no influence with you?" replied I, addressing Maude.

"Of no use at all," answered Marco; "she could not help it, because she is too good for this world; but it was assuredly of no use. I cannot suffer you to make any use of your knowledge. If you will promise to keep this meeting secret she shall go back with you; if you refuse to promise, I must take her away with me."

Maude looked at me with a strange expression. I think she wished me to refuse.

"I cannot promise," said I, faintly.

"Then you must take the consequences!" and he was moving away while he spoke. All the terrible possibilities to which I might be exposing Maude rushed into my mind. I had no knowledge of him. I had no right to have any faith in him merely because he looked well when he was making love. I must keep her at all hazards.

"Stop! stop!" I cried, pursuing them; "I promise anything."

He stopped instantly. "You give me your word that you will not reveal the fact of this meeting?"

"I give you my word of honour."

"So," said he, "it is enough. If it is found out in any other manner I give you free leave to speak, that you may be a witness against any possible calumnies. And now I will tell you my object and my purpose, for you are quite

right in supposing that I have both. I mean to support, and help, and comfort this—" he paused, looked down upon Maude, and smoothed her hair with his hand—"this child of mine, till the day when I can really take her away. I do this as secretly and carefully as I can, and we have great self-control, and we bear long separations, but sometimes we *must* meet and speak, or we could not live through the time. In less than two years she will be of age, and then I can take her; I shall not take her sooner unless I am forced (you might have forced me to it just now), because I want to do it openly, and because all is not yet ready. But, meantime, I watch her and guard her, and though she suffers" (I cannot describe the tone of anguish in which he uttered the words "she suffers"), "no harm shall befall her, and nothing shall part her from me in the end. And now, *amor mio*, you must go back and bear it a little longer."

"Oh, I can bear it very well, now," said she, trying to force a smile.

"And you, who love her," continued he, stretching out his hand towards me—"at least, she says so—do you take care of her for me; be tender with her; try to save her from pain; stay with her; don't let them send you away from her. Let me know that she has some one to be kind to her; they grieve her, they wound her, they torment her; ah! *me lo pagheranno!*"

I was right in thinking that his face was capable of expressing the fiercer passions.

It would be vain to attempt to describe the utter confusion and dismay of my thoughts. When I followed Maude

the idea that it could be possible for me to interrupt the interview of the lovers without breaking it off had never entered my mind. I expected that they would have been confounded when they saw me, and that I should have carried Maude away with me in a moment. And here I was, bound by a promise to conceal the interview; admitted, as it were, into their confidence, and receiving a solemn charge to preserve my pupil for the very person from whom it was my particular business to defend her. I felt like one who pursues a mountain path in the firm conviction that it is leading him home, but who suddenly finds that it has conducted him to the very verge of a great precipice. There he stands, helpless—before him is blank space—he has nothing to do but to stand still or to retreat. That I must have made *some* great blunder I was sure, but I did not see at the moment how to repair it. I felt guilty on all sides; and, strange to say, I felt guiltiest when the idea occurred to me that it would of course be my duty to telegraph for Mr. Langley, and that I had bound myself by no promise not to do that. I almost felt as if I ought to announce my intention.

While this disturbance of thought and feeling was surging within me, Maude and Marco were whispering together. I contemplated this proceeding with a vague sense that I ought to prevent it, and that I could not. I became more and more distressed, less and less mistress of myself; I began to doubt the reality of what I saw; I shut my eyes, opened them again, and thought that the scene around me must be a dream and a deception. Was it really late evening by the river-side, and was I here, helpless,

watching those two, and had I left a sick-bed and crept through the darkening woods only for this? Who was this man, with a bad brilliant face and an inexorable will, come to torment me and to destroy Maude? Was he not a villain, "with the morals and education of a pirate"? Were we not here in his power—no one to help us—and night drawing on? Was he going to murder us? I uttered a sort of cry, and burst into a passion of hysterical weeping, which relieved me for the moment, and, I believe, saved me from a fit of delirium.

They were instantly at my side. My recollection of what followed is imperfect; I remember Maude taking my head upon her breast and soothing me, and I hear the self-reproachful accents in which she said, "Oh, she is ill! she is ill! I knew she was ill, and we forgot it, and perhaps we have killed her!" I remember Marco disappearing for a moment and returning with water. I see, with curious accuracy of recollection, the little leathern cup in which he brought it, and I remember the pleasant shock upon my face. I see his look of inexpressible trouble, and I remember the thought which passed through my mind—"If I had cried sooner, perhaps I should have conquered him." Then a new face came upon the scene; there was a low call or a whistle, and Marco and another were carrying me up to the house. And the other was no stranger—it was my friend the saucy fisherman. He seemed to belong altogether to Marco, and do whatever he was bidden; he was very much puzzled by seeing me, and very sorry for me; but he asked no questions; and an odd sense came upon me that he, and Maude, and I were all

Marco's property, to be disposed of at his pleasure, and with no wills of our own in his presence. They carried me very quickly and tenderly, and I know that Marco begged my pardon, in a low, kind voice, and that he whispered certain effectual consolations to Maude as she walked beside him. When we reached the house door I felt desperate in my helplessness. I thought complete exposure was at hand. Even in my bewildered state I was conscious of extreme surprise and almost of amusement, when that imperturbable boy (I heard Marco call him Giuseppe) rang loudly at the door bell, and began shouting for Gwythyr and Irvine by their names as if he was their master.

"The greatest piece of luck in the world!" cried he, as the startled servants came trooping into the hall; "Jervis and I were making a short cut home through the grounds, when we came upon the ladies just after Miss Derwent had been taken ill and fainted. I don't know how they could have got home without us. Here, show us the way, will you? and don't look as if you were going to faint for company; we'll carry her upstairs. Now, Jervis, don't be awkward, that's a good fellow; don't swing the lady about as if she was a game bag; there—gently—that will do!"

While we went upstairs, the maids carrying candles and hastening on to get my bed ready, Giuseppe proceeded—

"I say, my dear" (this was in an undertone to Irvine), "do your ladies often go out as late as this in the evening? Because, do you know, I think they're after no good, and you'd better keep an eye upon them!"

"They do go very often," replied Irvine, quite im-

pressed by his off-hand manner, and evident superiority to his companion; "I often remonstrate with them, sir, because they are far too alive to the beauties of nature. But Miss Derwent was indisposed to-day, and I thought she was in bed."

"There it is now!" cried Giuseppe. "She's feverish, and I suppose she thought a breath of cool air and a look at the sunset would be good for her. But she's caught a dreadful cold, and I advise you to get all the drugs you can think of ready for her before the morning. And just tell your young lady not to be gadding about too much, for, to tell you the truth, I think the other was after her. Steady, Jervis."

We were going in at the bedroom door just then.

"Ah!" said Irvine, with sudden comprehension and ready confidence—there never was a lady's-maid yet who would not let out her mistress's secrets to a handsome boy who coaxed her for them—"I've no doubts of it, poor lady. Where did you please to meet them, sir?"

"Just across the lawn, by the opening, where they could get a glimpse of the sunset," answered he readily; "they hadn't been out five minutes, but it was long enough to do for one of 'em. So—that's the way—let her down easy. Why, we should make no end of a lady's-maid of you in time, Jervis, if you had this pretty girl to put you in the way of learning your work. Do you feel better, ma'am? I think, my love, she's a little hysterical, and we'd better leave her to you. Come along, Jervis."

He caught Marco by the arm, whispered something to him in a coaxing, imploring manner, and drew him away. I fancy he was afraid of his betraying himself by trying to get a last word with Maude.

"Who is Jervis?" said I, feebly, to Irvine, as she arranged my pillows.

"Colonel Seyton's new gamekeeper, ma'am. And that's the young gentleman that is lodging in his cottage."

XVII.—LOST.

The illness which followed the adventure which I have just narrated was not nearly so severe as might have been expected. I could almost have fancied that excitement and exertion had worked off the fever that was in my blood; but I do not know, medically, whether this is possible. Maude's attention was unremitting. She scarcely left my bedside for a moment. Whenever she did leave it, the tormenting idea was present to my mind that she was probably with Marco. For a few days my head was too weak, and my thoughts too much bewildered, to allow of my coming to a reasonable decision as to what I ought to do. There was just sufficient affection of the brain to make it extremely difficult and painful to me to speak intelligibly even when my thoughts were tolerably in order. I used to find that I had not said the thing that I intended to say; and when I tried to seize the idea or the word which I wanted it slipped out of my grasp in the most provoking manner, though I knew that I had held it scarcely a moment before. On the first day of the doctor's attendance, I begged him to telegraph for Mr. Langley; but when I tried to remember the address to which the telegram must be directed, I could not. No effort availed to recall it. I became much distressed, and was quite aware through it all that my doctor was soothing me and putting me by

as doctors do, and this increased my excitement. I told him it was of the highest importance that the telegram should be sent without delay.

"Yes, yes," said he, in a horrid, coaxing voice, which I shudder to recollect, "we'll see to it. Don't you think any more about it. There, there, there! it will all come right."

He was a short, punchy, red-faced man, whose outline closely resembled that of a highly-fed bullfinch. He always looked in a great heat. He was very much more familiar with me than if he had been my eldest brother. I hated him. No doubt my disgust showed itself in my manner, and strengthened his conviction that I was suffering from the excitement of fever, and scarcely in possession of my senses. He made a snatch at my pulse, and then patted my hand and put it back again under the bedclothes.

"There, there, there, there!" said he, "that will do, that will do!"

"But *will* you send the message?"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes—oh, yes!" was his answer. "I can easily learn the address downstairs. Downstairs, you know—that's where they'll tell me all about it. Don't you be frightened—you're going on as nicely as possible. There, there, there, there!"

"I want the maid!" cried I, in a kind of despair, and making helpless demonstrations towards the bell, which I could not reach.

"She shall come to you, she shall come in a minute. Don't you be uneasy about anything; she shall come;

she's coming; there, there, there!" said he, ringing the bell, which was the only tolerable thing he did in the course of the interview. "Now, just you lie still and get well, that's what you've got to do; and don't be worried about anything, and don't fret, and don't think—that's what it is—don't think, don't think; I m going downstairs, downstairs, you know, to see about the little telegram for you; just what you want, you know, everything will be done just as you wish. Good-bye! *good*-bye! there, there, there, *good*-bye!"

And to my infinite relief he went and Irvine came.

"Irvine," said I, "it is of great importance that Mr. Langley should be sent for, and I can't remember his direction. Will you please go instantly and give the direction, written down, to Mr. Davis before he leaves the house, and tell him from yourself that it is of great importance that a telegram should be sent?"

It is impossible to describe what it cost me to utter these words plainly and continuously. I really felt that it was my last effort; and when I had achieved it, I sank down among the pillows, and wished that the world would come to an end.

"I will arrange it without delay, ma'am," answered Irvine, in a most satisfactory tone, as she left the room.

I afterwards discovered that she went down to Mr. Davis and Maude in the drawing-room, and honestly delivered my message. But the particular interpretation which both she and Mr. Davis put upon my anxiety about the telegram had not occurred to me. They thought that I believed myself to be in imminent danger.

"No occasion, no occasion," said the little doctor; "she's nervous, she will be all right in a few days; no occasion to put Mr. Langley to any inconvenience. I'll give the alarm if it should be necessary. Keep her mind quiet, keep her mind quiet—there, there. Tell her the telegram is sent—don't let her fidget about anything. Good-bye, *good*-bye—see her again to-morrow."

And Irvine, who had not the most elementary regard for truth as such, told me that the telegram was sent, and I believed her.

When day followed on day, and Mr. Langley neither sent nor came, I was puzzled, but I cannot say that I was as much distressed as I ought to have been. I felt like a traitor to Maude, while she was besetting me with such tender care and anxiety, and there was an impulse within me of satisfaction that my attempt had failed—an impulse contradicted as often as it arose, and arising as often as it was contradicted.

During my illness, Colonel and Mrs. Seyton were constant in their attentions, and the two Mays became very intimate with Maude. Thus it happened that they were with us on the first day of my convalescence. I was on the sofa in the drawing-room, feeling weak but well, and fully intending to have an explanation at the first convenient opportunity with Maude. I had succeeded two days before in writing a few pencil lines to Mr. Langley, to inquire why he had not attended to the telegram. I thought it probable that he might arrive to-morrow, and I wanted to prepare Maude for the event as I best could. I looked at her now, she was unusually pale, and her eyes had that wistful pa-

thetic expression which comes from watching and waking. My heart ached for her.

"Maude," said I, "you must go for a walk. It is a lovely afternoon, and you have not gone beyond the garden for such a long time. You look as if you wanted reviving."

"Yes," cried Mrs. Seyton; "and May and I will stay and take care of you—won't we, May? Now don't look rebellious, Maude! Do you suppose we can't be responsible for Miss Derwent's safety and comfort for a single hour? Get away with you!" And she shook her skirts laughingly at Maude, as if she were trying to drive a kitten out of the room.

I knew that Maude might safely go out alone, for I had heard Mrs. Seyton say that her husband and the "gamekeeper, and some boy Frederick had picked up who's lodging with the gamekeeper, and who promises to be a first-rate shot, Frederick says," were gone off across the hills for a long day's sport on a manor of Colonel Seyton's, ten miles away. Maude seemed strangely disinclined to yield to our suggestions. She lingered about, and made objections till I felt quite provoked with her, secretly believing that it was her knowledge of this same shooting excursion which indisposed her for a walk, during which a meeting with her lover was impossible. But I thought that her disinclination was partly owing to the languor produced by want of exercise, and this made me the more determined to carry my point. Little May would have liked to go with her, but that would not have suited Mrs. Seyton's ideas at all. With all her ease and freedom,

there was a curious shyness about her, and I believe that she would not have felt at all comfortable if she had been left quite alone with me. She always wanted to have something belonging to herself in the room; something that she could play and pet with, and dispose of at her own pleasure. A *tête-à-tête* with any one except her husband would have seemed to her too serious a responsibility to be encountered cheerfully.

At last Maude submitted. She stood silent, in a half reverie, while we were urging her, as if she scarcely listened to us. I think I see her now. Then she came up to my sofa, kissed me on the forehead, and with a smile and a shake of the head, as if she was obeying under protest, left the room. It was her way in many things to linger long and then act suddenly, so that her mode of acquiescence did not surprise me. Nor was I surprised at that parting kiss, for since I had been ill all her reserve of manner had broken down, and she had been as caressing to me as if I were a child. She always seemed to feel great pity for physical incapacity or suffering: it was an intelligible evil, and there was no difficulty in bringing help and sympathy to bear upon it. Nevertheless, something in her manner *did* surprise me, though I could scarcely say what it was. Mrs. Seyton only expressed my feeling when she said as the door closed, "How strange she looked!"

The next moment Maude passed the window in her hat and cloak, turned and looked in at us, and nodded a laughing good-bye to little May. We watched her till she had crossed the lawn and entered the woods.

Then Mrs. Seyton proposed to play and sing to me.

She went to the piano, Little May at her side, and a very pleasant time followed, during which the mother and child sang and chattered together apparently more for their own amusement than for mine, with many bursts of gay infectious laughter caused by very small trifles. Presently they came away and sat down on the ground by the side of my sofa, and began to tell me stories in a sort of duet, now alternate, now together, and still with the under-current of laughter like a low accompaniment, uniting rather than interrupting the parts of the melody. At last Little May pulled out a fancy watch which she was in the habit of wearing in her bosom, and which I was in the habit of considering a very useless piece of extravagance as a gift to a child of her years.

"Mamma, darling," said she, "do you know it is more than half-past four?"

It was characteristic that it should be the child and not the mother who made this observation. The mother, however, was quite alive to its importance. "Oh, dear, dear!" she cried, "it will be getting dusk before we are at home. I had no notion it was so late. What *shall* we do, May? It seems so unkind to leave Miss Derwent quite alone."

"But I don't think we *promised* anything," answered May, solemnly.

"You little precise woman!" said her mother, kissing her. "Let us look out of the window and see if Maude is coming. What *can* make her so long?"

I too, was puzzled, for Maude had been gone more than an hour. Of course I urged my visitors not to wait for her, and assured them that I had no objection to a little

solitude. After much discussing, doubting, and wondering, they settled that they would wait till half-past five, and then be escorted to Clytha House by Gwythyr. Little May was the real deviser of this arrangement, as she reminded her mother that papa would certainly not come home before seven, and that they should have plenty of time to get ready for him. And when Mrs. Seyton hesitated about the lateness of the walk, May said, in her grave manner, "Mr. Gwythyr can take care of us if Miss Derwent will lend him. I think he is very strong, and not at all frightened."

After this decision there was a little fresh burst of gaiety, which carried us on till five o'clock, and then died finally away. Maude's continued absence began to make us seriously uneasy, though we did not yet allow to each other that there was any reason for uneasiness. I sent a supernumerary lad, who ran on errands for Gwythyr, to look for her in the opposite direction to Clytha, and assured Mrs. Seyton that she would probably meet her on the way home. I charged her to say that I was getting fidgety, and that she must hurry back as fast as possible. And she undertook the message eagerly, promising to give her a good scolding for being out so late, as if she wished by saying this to convince both herself and me that there could be no doubt of their meeting. Then the two Mays, well wrapped up, and protected by Gwythyr, departed, and I was left alone, waiting.

Waiting through the evening—waiting through the night—for Maude did not come back. The servant-boy came back and reported that he had seen nothing of her,

and then I expected her return with Gwythyr. But Gwythyr appeared between seven and eight with the same report. I sent a deputation out again, with lanterns, to search the woods. I thought that she might have fallen and sprained her ankle—that she might have lost her way —every conjecture probable and improbable presented itself to my mind, till, as the night advanced, the blank horror of the truth settled down upon me. She was gone!

Daybreak found me still sitting by the drawing-room window, pale, exhausted, despairing. *What* had happened? My thoughts refused to admit the fact. I tried to persuade myself that for some inconceivable reason she had gone astray and taken shelter in one of the few cottages of the valley, and that she would appear with the morning. But these were merely words. Some messenger could surely have been found in such a case to reassure me. With the first light I sent to Clytha House. And just as I was sitting down to begin my mockery of a breakfast, Colonel Seyton walked into the room.

XVIII.—THE SEARCH BEGINS.

When the first condolences and expressions of surprise were over, came the inevitable inquiry for which I had been preparing myself—"Had you any reason to suppose it likely—possible—that Miss Langley would contemplate leaving her home? Had there been any difference between you?"

"We were on affectionate terms" I replied, "and I cannot now believe that she intended to deceive me. But

I have been thinking the matter over, and as I am not certain that Mr. Langley will arrive to-day, I feel that it will be my wisest course to tell you, in confidence, a few particulars."

I hesitated. He sat down, and looked at me with steady, earnest attention. I then gave him a sketch, necessarily very imperfect, of Maude's position. I was embarrassed at every sentence, for I really hardly knew what I believed myself about some of the more important points. I gave as little retrospective information as possible; merely mentioning the main facts that Maude had been left with her mother's family; that she had formed an engagement unsanctioned by her father; that she had been brought here chiefly in order to place her out of her lover's reach, but that I had reason to believe that he had discovered her and followed her.

"Oh!" said Colonel Seyton, "I am afraid the case is clear enough. The next thing is to trace her and find out whether this rascal means to marry her. It is just possible that we may still be in time to save her."

"Stop!" said I, "I have not yet told you the principal reason for confiding in you."

When I mentioned the fact that the Italian lover, for whom Colonel Seyton seemed from the first to feel an instinctive repugnance quite beyond the reach of argument, had come to Clytha as *his* gamekeeper, his astonishment and disgust knew no bounds. He was far more disturbed by this incident of Maude's disappearance than he had been by the disappearance itself. He resented every item of it down to the "fellow's English accent, which might

have taken anybody in." He was also greatly aggrieved by the recollection that Marco was "such a capital shot." He got up and walked about the room in the height of his indignation; then rang the bell with a slight apology to me, sent for his own man, who had been directed to follow him to Parc Rhaiader after executing certain orders, and questioned him.

"Did you go to the cottage as I desired you? Where was Jervis?"

"He wasn't in, sir."

"Do you know where he was? Do you know when he went out?"

"He came home last night as usual, sir, but he was out before light looking after some poacher snares in the east wood. The young master, that's what the people by here calls the little feller as lodges with him, he went out with him, and neither on 'em was come back when I was up at their place."

"Came home last night as usual," repeated Colonel Seyton; "the scoundrel has looked after his snares to some purpose. But this gives me a shade of hope. You can go, James," he added, as he turned to me to explain on what his hope was founded.

"If you please, sir," said the man, respectfully, "Mrs. Prichard was here waiting to speak to Miss Derwent or to you: she has something to tell you, sir, about Miss Langley, I believe."

"Send her up when the bell rings," answered Colonel Seyton. His eyes flashed fire for a moment when the man named Miss Langley, but as the door closed after him,

he said to me in a tone of vexation, "Do what we will, her name will be in everybody's mouth before the day is half over; but, if possible, we must prevent their coupling it with any other name. As soon as we have heard what this Mrs. Prichard has to say, I will go and do my best to find out what persons Jervis associated or corresponded with. She appears to have gone to some place preconcerted between them, to wait for him till this morning. The valley is so thinly peopled I can hardly doubt our tracing her; and if we can find her in the course of the day, she may yet be restored."

I shook my head. "I fear it will be useless," said I; "you have no idea how deeply they are attached. If Mr. Langley could have been induced to sanction their engagement—"

The supreme amazement with which Colonel Seyton regarded me fairly stopped me in the middle of my sentence. "Sanction their engagement!" cried he. "What father who was not qualified for a lunatic asylum would sanction the engagement of a girl of seventeen with a foreign desperado, who has nothing to recommend him except his mode of handling a gun? I would sooner see her in her grave."

"I think," said I, hesitatingly, "there is something to be said for Maude; you know they had been attached from childhood, and I assure you there are redeeming points—attractions—qualities—in her cousin, and I don't think the wisest measures were adopted for separating them. There was, perhaps, a little want of openness; a little straining of authority—"

"*Any* measures were justifiable in such a case," answered he, shortly. "Is Miss Langley's fortune independent of her father?"

"I believe so; her mother's money is secured to her."

"Ah! I thought as much; and I remember enough to be sure that it is a stake worth playing for. Do you know positively that she gave this fellow a meeting, or do you only suspect it?"

"I knew it," answered I, feeling my cheeks burn under his scrutinising eyes, which had watched me with a displeased and distrustful expression from the moment in which I attempted to say a word for the lovers.

"The meeting took place with your knowledge?" said he, quickly.

"Not with my sanction,' I replied; "it came to my knowledge when it was too late to prevent it."

"And has there yet been time for Mr. Langley to answer the communication which of course you made to him?"

"I telegraphed for him when I was first taken ill," said I. "This was what I had been directed to do in case of difficulty. Having received no answer to the telegram, I wrote two days ago, and as this morning's post brings me no letter, I expect that he will arrive in the course of the day."

"That's well," with an air of relief; "and now, with your permission, we will have Mrs. Prichard up before I go out to make further investigations."

Mrs. Prichard entered with a courtesy, and stood still, waiting to be questioned. Colonel Seyton looked at his *watch.*

"I can wait just five minutes to hear what this good lady has to say," said he to me, "and then leave her to finish her story to you, if necessary."

I admired his preliminary attempt to condense her deposition as much as possible. I knew that it was his opinion that a man generally used twice as many words as were necessary, and a woman twice as many words as a man. Mrs. Prichard was a straightforward, sensible woman, though not without a pretty strong opinion as to her own dignity.

"I know there's reason for haste, sir," she replied, "but there's never any reason in hurry. I see something in the valley yesterday which I thought you might like to hear on."

Colonel Seyton's foot tapped the ground a little impatiently.

"Well," said he, in a tone which implied some indignation at her leaving her statement incomplete; "what was it?"

"It wasn't a partridge nor a woodcock, sir, or I'd not be betraying it to you; it was a carriage."

He was on the alert in a moment. "When did you see it?"

"A little past four in the afternoon."

"And where?"

"I was going home; I was crossing the little footbridge a mile down, or thereabouts, and just about a quarter of an hour before I had passed Miss Langley, walking by herself, and given her a 'good evening.' I stopped in the middle of the bridge to steady my basket,

and over the tops of the bushes, a long way off, I could see a coach-box, with a man on it, coming up the valley."

"Coming up the valley. So that Miss Langley would meet it?"

"If she held on her way she must meet it, just about in the hollow where the river turns. It was going down there, and I couldn't see it. There's not above twenty yards of that road can be seen anywhere, and it's only from the bridge you can see that."

"True," said Colonel Seyton, approvingly. He knew every inch of the country as well as if he had been a military bird of vast experience engaged to supervise the district. He now turned to me. "This is a glimpse of light," said he. "We know the carriage did not come on here, and as there was nowhere else for it to go, it must have returned—probably to the station. The last up-train is due at 7.20 at our station. I think my best course will be to ride in and make inquiries."

"I see the carriage go back, sir," observed Mrs. Prichard, with quiet triumph.

"You did!" cried he. "How long? *Pray* be so good as to tell me everything at once."

"To tell truth, sir," said she, "I waited to see it pass me, for four wheels and two horses is an exception to my daily walks which I couldn't rest under without examination, and just by chance I happened to look towards them twenty yards of open road as we spoke on, in time to see the carriage clear 'em again. Back it was going the way it came, but as much faster as if a ghost had turned it back, and was coming at its heels."

"That's proof," said Colonel Seyton; "and now I'll not lose a moment." He was gone almost while he spoke.

"As impatious a foreigner as ever I see," observed Mrs. Prichard, when he was out of the room. She always called the English foreigners. "He was pawing and scrowntling the carpet like a horse or a hound all the while I kept on prefacing at him before I got to my story. I warrant he's felt the lash some way in his youth, or he'd never have been able to hold in as he did. Nobody knows how tempted I felt when he spoke out so firm like a crisis, and told me to tell him everything I'd seen at once. If I'd take him at his word, now, and begun from the hand-rail of the bridge, and gone on to the water with the pebbles in it, and the grass by the edge, and so up to the bushes, describing and disputing all the way, I warrant he'd have rampaged himself in two before ever I got to the carriage."

There was an odd twinkle in her eye, which convinced me that she would have really enjoyed the catastrophe.

"It's a pity for Miss Maude, too," she continued, after a pause, "and I'd never have told upon her if I'd felt sure that Jervis was trustworthy. But I never know'd a first-rate shot in my life as made a first-rate husband. They get so used to overreaching and triumphing—and poor triumph it is, too, circumventing the dumb things that might be a lesson to 'em, for they never goes beyond the duties they was born to. Wife and child have but a shabby chance with a fellow that's used to shortening happy, helpless lives for fun; and taking as much pains about it as

might have made him Lord Chancellor, if he'd gone in an honest direction."

I was surprised at her evident knowledge of "Jervis" as Maude's lover, and could not help asking her how she found it out. *She* could not help laughing at the simplicity of the question.

"Ladies is the most innocent things in creation!" cried she. "They shuts their eyes and feels sure nobody else sees 'em. Why, there isn't a child in the village but knows it better than his catechiz! My little James—near upon ten years old—he come home from school a fortnight since, and 'Mother,' says he, 'there's Jervis gone down to Miss Langley's again.' I gave him a clout on the cheek out of mere formality, for I never could understand myself why scandal should be thought so sacred that it's only allowed to be used by them as is well stricken in years. But I couldn't but laugh to think how well he know'd. And you be sure of this, Miss, there isn't a servant in the house but knows a deal more than ever happened."

"I wish," said I, "there was one to be found who knew the only thing I care to discover, and that is, what has become of Miss Langley. I don't like talking about her to you, Mrs. Prichard, but you are a kind, sensible woman, and I may ask you to speak a good word for her, and try to check any ill-natured talk you may hear. It is all dark at present, but I feel sure that we shall find out in the end that she has been deceived, and that she never intended to do really wrong."

"Bless your heart, Miss," she replied, "all the ill-nature goes the opposite way. It's for you and for Miss

Langley's father the good word should be spoken. The working classes always takes kindly to a pair of lovers, and it's a real glory to 'em to think they're hardly dealt by. I'd take a pretty wager, now, that every man, woman, and child in Clytha, that's talking the matter over at this moment, thinks of you and Mr. Langley as if you was a couple of Cæsar Bar-jees, keeping the poor young thing shut up in a regular Bluebeard's temple of your own, and grinding your teeth over her for scorn, whenever her back's turned."

Here Mrs. Prichard took her leave, and my heart died within me as the sound of wheels on the gravel and a certain unmistakable commotion in the hall announced Mr. Langley's arrival.

XIX.—HOW NOT TO FIND HER.

"The first thing that made me suspect Miss Derwent, sir, was a coincidence about trout."

This was Irvine's composed answer to Mr. Langley, who had summoned her and Gwythyr to give all the information they could about recent events in my presence. He had met Colonel Seyton on his way, and learned from him the bare fact of Maude's disappearance. He came on, in order to investigate matters on the spot, to consult with me, and to determine what measures should be adopted in the first instance. His manner was, as usual, kind and self-governed; but strong agitation was visible through his habitual control. After exchanging a few sentences with me, he sent for Irvine and Gwythyr,

and asked what they were able to tell him about the last few weeks; and this was the result of the question.

"The first thing that made me suspect Miss Derwent, sir, was a coincidence about trout."

Mr. Langley turned to me with a silent and surprised inquiry in his face.

"Let them tell you all they can, sir," said I, as steadily as I could, "and I will explain afterwards; but, till this moment, Irvine has kept her suspicions to herself most successfully."

I knew that my colour was coming and going, and my hands quivering in a most guilty manner. I was physically exhausted by my recent illness and my sleepless night; and, as to my mind, besides the great distress and anxiety which I felt about Maude, I was altogether uncertain whether I should be able to justify myself in her father's eyes by the fullest statement of the truth, fully believed.

"If my conscience doesn't taunt me, Miss, I can sustain a governess without shrinking," retorted Irvine, by no means laying aside the elegance of her English, but addressing me with a kind of insolence very unlike her usual bearing. I little suspected the wrath which had been smouldering in her soul during the six months of submission which she had been compelled to pass under the sway of a "governess." She had her revenge now. I sat by and patiently listened to her narrative. She told Mr. Langley how Gwythyr had been puzzled by finding his basket enriched by fish that he had not caught; how she had thrown some light on the difficulty by relating

that, from an attic window, she had seen me in conversation with Giuseppe (whom she invariably called Juicy P); how she had found the fatal handkerchief in one of my drawers, with an unanswerable fragrance of fish accusing me from its folds. Here she produced the article in question, with a daring look at me, as much as to say, "You see, Miss, I have searched you like a culprit!" and I felt in my heart what a simpleton I had been to slip, as it were by chance, into this unnecessary scrape. She went on to say how steadily I had ignored all her honest attempts to co-operate in what she was pleased to call "the reclamation of Miss Maude." How I had gradually fallen under the influence of that unhappy girl, and allowed her more liberty than Mr. Langley would have sanctioned; how Gwythyr had detected me holding an assignation after dark with Marco himself, and "Juicy P" besides; how I had presided at a meeting between the lovers, and actually introduced the two adventurers into the house. "On which occasion, sir," she proceeded, "being in half-light and most audacious manners, neither Mr. Gwythyr nor I were in the slightest degree aware what we contemplated in that Juicy P. We saw him entirely under the emblem of a young English gentleman as he assumed, and we were altogether deceived by the semblance of a gamekeeper accompanying him. It was not for several days, sir, that the illusion dispersed, and we discovered quite inadvertently what it had devolved upon us to witness without understanding; and though I am the last person in the world, sir, to turn my back in scorn upon my neighbour's mote, it is very much borne in

upon me that Miss Derwent's illness was only an ambush and a stratagem in order to divest herself from the villainy which has been perpetrated. Mr. Davis, sir, thought her in no danger when she was representing herself to me as imminent; and by remaining in bed, sir, you see, she was aloof from the catastrophe."

I was unpleasantly surprised to find how strong a case there was against me. At intervals Irvine appealed to Gwythyr for his testimony, which he gave in very different fashion from hers, fidgeting, looking down, shying away from the questions, and doing anything rather than speak out. Still the substance of his reluctant evidence was all confirmatory of her tale. "He didn't know—he wouldn't like to take upon his-self to say; but, well—yes—true enough—he *did* meet Miss Derwent that night. As for where the trout came from, that was not his business; they must ha' come out o' water, for they never growed out o' the ground that he know'd of. He didn't catch 'em, no, certainly not; but they'd nobody's mark on 'em, and couldn't be brought home to nobody. And that ere sarcy-tongued young chap had a hand in the carrying off of Miss Maude, no doubt; he was up to anything, and he was always about with the other fellow, that was certain; but as to what Miss Derwent had to do with them both, or either, he didn't wish to give an opinion. And about Miss Derwent's illness, he know'd well enough what the doctor said, and what Mrs. Irvine said, and very like they had the best of reasons; but he had no reason nor no call to say anything about it, not being a nurse nor a doctor; and he would rather not say anything about it, one way or the other."

The accusation having been heard, I expected that I should be called upon for my defence. But Mr. Langley sat silent and thoughtful when Gwythyr had done speaking, and did not even look towards me.

"Why did you not write and warn me when you first suspected that Miss Langley was making assignations which I should disapprove?" asked he of Irvine, in a cold, quiet tone, which evidently surprised that superior woman very much.

"I should have been afraid, sir, of violating the terms of my province," answered she, with only a moment's hesitation; "it is a kind of offence, sir, which I hope always to omit. If I had been entrusted even with the superficial charge of Miss Langley, I should have been careful to elude all opportunities of misconduct."

"That is not the question," said her master; "the question is, why you, being well acquainted with the circumstances of the case, allowed *anything* to occur which seemed to you suspicious, without reporting it to me. It was clearly your duty to have done so. It appears that Miss Derwent was deceived, and that you were not. What you suspected you ought to have reported. Had you done so, this terrible event might have been prevented. There—I quite believe it was only an error of judgment—you may go for the present."

"If my judgment is to be impugned, or imputed, sir, perhaps I had better go altogether," replied she, even with a sudden toss of the head.

"You are a foolish girl," said he. "Go, and take time to consider. I should be sorry to be obliged to say, in

answer to any application for your character, that I had parted with you because you concealed the circumstances which led to Miss Langley's elopement."

He turned so decidedly away from her, and Gwythyr so pertinaciously held the door open, that she had no course but to leave the room, which she did with a murmur and a prance, hiding her crest-fallen spirit under an air of bravado.

My turn came next, and though Mr. Langley's gentleness was unshaken, and his courtesy unimpeachable, I felt that the reprimand which I received was virtually the same as Irvine's. I felt, too, that I was most indulgently treated, and that I had nothing to say for myself. He did not for a moment tax me with treachery in any shape. No self-defence was possible to me, for I was, in fact, only accused—or rather, held guilty—of that which I had done. He considered that my judgment had been at fault —that I had given too easy a credence to Maude's version of her own story—that I had been timid and uncertain where I ought to have acted with promptness and decision—that, with the best intentions and principles, I had shown myself incapable of controlling so difficult a character as Maude's. The few words of deep and painful feeling with which he alluded to the result of all this were enough in themselves to silence me. How could I have complained if he had indignantly demanded his daughter at my hands, and held me responsible for her disappearance? He asked me very few questions—the evil, he said, was done—the question now was not so much how it had happened, as whether it was remediable or not. He counted unhesitatingly on any assistance which I might

be able to give him. He was now going out to make certain investigations in the neighbourhood. Before the evening Colonel Seyton would return and report the result of his inquiry at the station, and at the tiny town of Llanefydd, from which it took its name, which was a mile from the station. He requested me to make such arrangements as should enable me to leave Parc Rhaiader at my earliest convenience; though, having said this, he returned to add that he did not in the least wish to hurry my movements, but that, as he contemplated departing himself, and breaking up the establishment as soon as possible, it might be disagreeable to me to remain; and it might, on the other hand, be advantageous to me to make my journey as a member of his family, because this would discountenance any unpleasant rumours.

I felt like a pardoned criminal, over whose head the unfulfilled sentence which he had incurred was still suspended. I had attempted to begin some explanation of my intercourse with Giuseppe, and of the absurd affair of the trout: he stopped me at once with "Pray don't trouble yourself to explain; these are trifles which cannot engage one's attention for a moment under present circumstances." I hazarded a word or two about the strength of Maude's attachment, and the false pretensions under which she evidently laboured. Here, too, I was checked in a moment. "I am quite aware that you have been deceived," said Mr. Langley, gravely; "the details of the deception signify little; we can discuss them hereafter."

While Mr. Langley was out I made my arrangements. I dismissed Irvine from the bed-room (where I found her

rummaging Maude's drawers), locked the door, and proceeded myself to review the poor girl's possessions before I began upon my own. I hoped that I was in time to prevent any unnecessary exposure of her little secrets. I searched for evidence that she had contemplated this sudden departure, but found none. I was well acquainted with the limits of her wardrobe. She had taken nothing with her, not even a bundle of the merest necessaries. She had left no letter for me or for her father. Her receptacles were curiously devoid of the usual treasures of girlhood—the trifles and the relics which mark the passing of a pleasant time, or the formation of a new friendship—the little indications which show that the inner life has been busy and happy and complete in itself. There were no dried flowers, no packets of letters, no keepsakes, no notebooks—nothing but the mere necessary appliances of daily life. Had she destroyed all such tokens lest they should be discovered, or had she really never possessed them? As I wandered about the room full of painful reflections, my eye fell upon her bed, which had been already dismantled in readiness for our departure. Only the mattress and the paliasse were left upon it, and I thought I perceived some object which had been hidden between them, and displaced by the recent hasty arrangements. I drew out a box made of some foreign wood, curiously carved and scented. It had no lock, but was tied round with a faded silver ribbon. I could not bear to take it to Mr. Langley, yet I did not think myself justified in leaving it unopened; its contents might throw some light on the past, and give some guidance for the present. I opened it, therefore,

very regretfully, resolving to examine only so far as seemed absolutely necessary, and to conceal as much as I could of what the poor child herself had so vainly laboured to hide. What a collection I found! A long lock of soft brown hair, with the label "Lilia"—two or three bits of ribbon —a glove—a piece of paper with a prayer written on it, in Italian, in a half-formed girlish hand—a string of perfumed beads with a label attached, having on it, in the same handwriting, the words, "Giorno di nascita della diletta mia Lucia"—an embroidered collar, half finished, with the needle still in the last stitch, and the thread and a small ivory thimble carefully wrapped up in it: these were records of the young, dead sister—all that she had been able to preserve. Other locks of hair there were, belonging to the unknown mother, to the aunt, and to the beloved uncle Rossetti; one or two slight pencil sketches, among them a profile of a young girl, very pretty, and with just so much of likeness to Maude, as to make me feel certain that it was a portrait of Lilia. Then there was a packet containing little bunches of withered grass and wild flowers, each with a name fastened to it, and the whole inscribed, "Gathered on the graves." Several of the names were unknown to me—I supposed them to be friends of the Montevideo and Italian days. The name of Lilia was, of course, absent from this collection. The last thing which I found—after many other little relics, all of the same description—was a single violet blossom, wrapped in paper, with the words "Giorno felice" on the envelope. Poor Maude! Only one tiny record of happiness in the midst of all these sad monumental remembrances!

Except this mysterious blossom, there was nothing in the box which I could refer to Marco, and I guessed that she carried his letters about her person, thinking them too precious to be exposed even to the remotest chance of discovery. I tied up the box and put it among my own things, hoping that I might some day have the opportunity of restoring it to her. Then, with a heavy heart, I finished my preparations.

Before evening Colonel Seyton returned. He had little to tell. At the station, he could at first learn nothing—it had been market-day, and the recollection of the officials was confused by the number of passengers. An examination of the cancelled tickets, however, showed that there had been two "through-tickets" from London delivered—a first and a second class. Further inquiry elicited that a servant out of livery, supposed to be the proprietor of the second class ticket, had questioned one of the railway porters about Llanefydd inn, asking "If he knew whether the chaise-and-pair was out to-day, as it was not at the station, and the one-horse traps wouldn't do for him." Colonel Seyton, concluding from these words that the questioner was a man familiar with the place, asked the porter whether he had recognized him. But the porter was a new hand, and could tell nothing about it, and nobody else at the station seemed to have noticed the matter. Colonel Seyton then went to Llanefydd inn, and learned there that the only chaise-and-pair of the establishment had been hired to go to Parc Rhaiader about half an hour after the arrival of the London train. He now thought that he was fairly on the track of

his game. But the answer to his next question was a disappointment. The chaise had been hired by a boy, who came running at the top of his speed to execute the commission, and who said that the gentlemen were in a great hurry and had walked on. Had he named the gentlemen? No. How was it that the landlord had attended to such a vague, unsatisfactory sort of order? Well, it was the dead time of year, and very little doing, and he thought he'd take the chance of the job. Who drove the chaise? Well, that was the odd part of the matter: Jack drove it —he had been in the service of the inn for about a year, and didn't belong to this part of the country; he was a Londoner, an honest, steady kind of a lad, and they were very sorry to lose him. But Jack had not returned. The chaise was brought back this morning by a stranger—a country fellow—who averred that it had been entrusted to him by Jack, with the message that he was not coming back never no more.

"Did you see this fellow?" asked Mr. Langley.

"No; I couldn't get at him. He did not belong to Llanefydd, and was unknown to the people of the inn. He honestly delivered the sovereign with which he had been entrusted, saying, with a laugh, that he could afford it, as he had been well paid for his part of the business. I ascertained that the place at which he met the chaise was about half-way along the high road to Llanfair." This was a town about twenty miles from Llanefydd station.

"What was your next step?"

"I doubted whether I should go to Llanfair myself or

return here. On the whole, I thought it best to make my report to you in person. I sent my man—who is a clever fellow, and quite to be trusted—to Llanfair, to pick up what he could. Then I hunted up the boy who had hired the carriage, and pumped him for ten minutes, but I could screw nothing out of him, except that he 'know'd there was two gentlemen, and he thor't one on 'em wasn't a gentleman.' "

"I am infinitely obliged to you for all the trouble you have taken," said Mr. Langley. "We are at sea for the present. We have no evidence that they were at Llanfair at all. There are a dozen other towns or villages to which they might just as easily have gone, and, if they wanted to mislead, they would, of course, take care that the carriage should be found in the high road to some place at which they had *not* been."

"Then it is such hopeless work digging evidence of any sort out of these puzzle-headed Welshmen," said Colonel Seyton, indignantly. "They say whatever they fancy you want them to say. I found that out at the station. Three or four fellows remembered having seen you there, but not one of them knew really whether it was to-day or yesterday. At first they took it into their heads that I was inquiring about you, and then they were all ready to take their oaths that you came down by the train yesterday; but as soon as I said it was to-day, every man of them was sure it was to-day he had seen you."

"I know the sort of thing perfectly," replied Mr. Langley; "it is harassing in the extreme. I think it quite useless to make any further inquiries at Llanefydd, and,

indeed, mischievous, for Rossetti has evidently got some agent there, and we should only be showing our game. Any questions we may ask there will doubtless be forwarded to him."

"What do you propose doing, then?" asked Colonel Seyton, a little stiffly, as if he thought that the last words implied a comment upon his own discretion.

"I propose returning to London at once, and setting the detective police at work."

Colonel Seyton twisted his moustache. "Humph!" said he, uneasily, "I suppose it's the only way; but one hates the exposure."

"The exposure, believe me, is the least possible under the circumstances. The police don't gossip; their interest is in facts, not persons; in their work, and not in the subjects of it. Private investigations fill a whole country with their rumour. But," he added, shaking his head, and with a sorrowful change of voice, "I am afraid it is too late to think about exposure."

"I hope," said Colonel Seyton, "you do not think that I—"

"Pray don't make such a mistake," interrupted Mr. Langley, grasping his hand; "what you have done was absolutely necessary, and has been done in the most judicious manner possible. We had to discover as much as we could privately, before beginning on the other tack. But give me your candid opinion—have we *not* discovered as much as we can? Is there any use in pushing this further?"

Colonel Seyton relaxed. "Your own feelings must be,

of course, the guide and the limit for others," said he; "I have really nothing to suggest, except one idea which occurred to me when I was riding back."

"What is that?"

"The whol edistrict between Llanefydd and Llanfair is as primitive as possible; this is not the time of year for tourists; wherever that chaise went I feel sure that it must have attracted observation. I would beat up the country before the people have had time to forget it, and try whether I couldn't trace out its course."

"An *excellent* thought," said Mr. Langley, warmly; "I will lose no time in putting it in practice."

"We know," said Colonel Seyton, "the hour, or nearly the hour, at which it turned back upon this road. We know that it did not go back to Llanefydd. We know that there are only two cross-country lanes by which it could have left the Llanefydd road; and further we know the hour and the place at which it reappeared. Surely, these are pretty good materials to begin with."

Mr. Langley was writing with a pencil in his pocket-book while the other spoke. "I have made notes of all the points," said he. "I really have not words to thank you."

Colonel Seyton rose to take leave. "If there is anything further that I can do—" began he.

"Thank you, thank you," returned Mr. Langley, shaking him heartily by the hand; "I shall count upon you; I shall come to you for advice and help; the persons whom I employ will gladly refer to you for guidance. I feel very inhospitable in letting you go so early, but I frankly

confess that I am worn out, and must get a little sleep if I can. I shall be off by daylight to-morrow."

No one who saw Mr. Langley's paleness, which had visibly increased during this conversation, could doubt that he was worn out. No one could wonder at it. Colonel Seyton's adieux to me were made a little coldly. I knew that I had lost ground in his esteem, and I knew when and why I had lost it. He went, and I felt as he went that he had been courteously and gratefully dismissed, not only from Mr. Langley's presence, but from any further interference in his private affairs; and I felt that he, too, felt it, and acquiesced in it. Probably he knew that, under like circumstances, he himself would have desired to be let alone. At any rate, he was not the man to press his services a moment longer or an inch further, than he felt them to be acceptable.

I did not fail to notice that Mr. Langley had said nothing to Colonel Seyton about the tenor and result of his own inquiries. Neither did he say anything on the subject to me. He simply asked whether I could be ready to start to-morrow morning, and, on being answered in the affirmative, wished me good-night.

In the morning I found that it was not his intention to accompany me to Llanefydd station. Gwythyr was to drive Irvine and myself in the identical basket-carriage which had brought me down with poor Maude six months before. Mr. Langley said nothing of his own plans till his horse was brought to the door, about half an hour before our starting time. Then, as he rose to leave the room, he said, "I have been thinking over Colonel Seyton's

suggestions, and it occurs to me that if I ride round by St. Arthur's, and catch the train at Freeland station, instead of going with you to Llanefydd, there are several inquiries that I may make. I shall have ample time. If I don't see you when I join, you must look out for me at Paddington. I take for granted that you come home with me, and remain till you have had time to communicate with your father, and, indeed, for as much longer as you like. Good-bye."

He was gone without waiting for my reply. Nothing could be kinder or more considerate; but how I hated that drive to the station with Irvine! I buried myself in a book which I had read before, but my consciousness of her hostile presence deprived me of all power of understanding it. She cried nearly the whole way.

XX.—MR. DERWENT'S IDEAS.

"I rather like this Italian bravo of yours, Jane," said my father. "He has circumvented you all so neatly that he really deserves his success."

"I can't laugh about it," answered I.

"What is your last news? I saw you had letters this morning."

"There is no news at all—not a trace. The Llanefydd country has been hunted all over; a description of the two has been sent to every railroad station along the line; the detectives have been at work; and the result of all is simply nothing. She has disappeared. Oh! you may think me utterly absurd, but if I were only sure he would be good to her I should hardly mind it, for she never

could have been moderately happy with her own people. But the way in which he has behaved makes me distrust him."

"I should think it did," said my father; "and, really, Jane, I don't think my conscience will allow me to let you seek another situation as governess. You are a dangerous guide for youth. Any foreign scamp that likes may run away with your pupil if only he can persuade you that he means to be good to her."

"This was a peculiar case," began I.

"Not at all," he replied; "a case of every-day occurrence."

"My dear papa," cried Emma, "how *can* you make that out? Surely it is not common for English girls to be brought up in South America, and to fall in love with their cousins there, and to be lost in Italy, and to come back to England, and to hate all their own relations, and to have two different names, so that you can't tell them asunder, and to run away with the cousins they originally fell in love with, and never to be heard of afterwards. Besides having the Italian Revolution brought into it, which is surely not common."

"Well done, Emma!" said my father, joyously; "your logical triumphs are easy as usual. It's only the geography of the case that's uncommon, my dear, the incidents are older than the Flood. I've no doubt there were plenty of young ladies in prehistoric Egypt who fell in love with their cousins, and resisted the efforts of their families to bring them to a better frame of mind, and ran away, as you express it, with the cousins they originally fell in love with

—or with somebody else—if their governesses didn't take proper care of them. It's the nature of young ladies, and, so far as my experience goes, education has not been invariably successful in eradicating it."

"Nothing shall ever persuade me," said Emma, with unusual pertinacity, "that all this about Miss Langley and the Italian and Jane is likely to have happened before."

"There isn't much evidence that it has happened now," said my father. "I think the verifying faculty of some future critic will reject the whole story as manifestly legendary. Though, for that matter, there is a great deal of this present Italian Revolution which coming historians will certainly pronounce to be mythical."

Emma stared. "But, Jane," continued my father, seriously, "there is one part of your scheme of search which I don't understand. You say that descriptions of 'the two' have been sent to every railroad station along the line. Now, the oddest feature of the whole matter is, that the two were *not* together. Mr. Marco was acting gamekeeper till long after the hour at which the carriage took off his lady-love, and he did not start to join her till the next morning. How do you know that she did not make her whole journey under the escort of his accomplice—the fellow who came down from London and hired the chaise at Llanefydd?"

"That is the only thing we *do* know," said I. "Mr. Langley picked up that morsel of information on his ride to Freeland. He found that two persons exactly answering to the description of his daughter and Rossetti breakfasted at a farmhouse very early on the morning of the day

before we left Parc Rhaiader. You must not forget the dates. Maude disappeared on the seventeenth of January, Mr. Langley came down on the eighteenth, and we all left Parc Rhaiader on the nineteenth. They had just one day the start of us, as we know that she must have been hidden somewhere during that first night, and that Marco did not join her till the next morning—the eighteenth. Well, on that morning they breakfasted together at the farmhouse of which I tell you, in a little village two miles from Freeland station. They left the place walking. Mr. Langley concluded that they would take the train at Freeland, but we could hear nothing of them there."

"Humph!" replied my father; "I have some very odd ideas. Just let me look at the family photograph again, will you?" Emma produced it.

"That face and figure *ought* to be easily recognised," said my father, looking at Maude's portrait. "Well, Jane, I will say no more than this—I suspect that Mr. Langley has been misled. I don't think the couple breakfasted at that farmhouse."

"What *do* you think, then?" asked I, eagerly.

"That is precisely what I am not going to tell you."

"But, father," said I, "I am more anxious than I can tell you that you should really take an interest in the matter, and exert yourself to help us in finding out as much as we can."

"My 'lightest conjecture is to be received as a divination,' I suppose—as Arnold says of Niebuhr, in the same breath in which he rejects the tradition of five-and-twenty generations. Well, what is the particular point

you wish me to begin conjecturing about? I am quite ready."

"I want you to come with me to-night. Mrs. Langley has asked me to accompany her to a *séance* at the house of some one of these clairvoyants—you know she is a profound believer; I want you to go with me, first to the *séance*, and afterwards to tea at the Langleys'.—There!"

My father made a face. "I *might* screw myself up to the spirit-rapping business," said he; "I never saw that particular form of swindling, and I should not dislike making its acquaintance. But the tea-party afterwards! What do you see in me, my daughter, that can make you think me capable of such an abandonment of the principles and practice of my whole life as is involved in the idea of going out to tea?"

Notwithstanding this unfavourable beginning, I carried my point. I really counted much upon my father's shrewd, dispassionate observation. And my discomfort in the presence of the Langleys was great; I could not refuse their attentions, but I felt that he would be a great support to me while I was receiving them. They had been very kind to me since my return home. I had seen little of Mr. Langley; but Mrs. Langley, who appeared to me to be the most unaffectedly distressed about Maude, had taken care to inform me of every attempt that was made to discover her, and of every failure as it occurred. She knew that I did not believe in her spirit-rapping theories, but she was very anxious to convert me. She had repeatedly asked me to accompany her to one of the *séances*, and to judge for myself. Lately she had told me, with much tri-

umph, that she really thought she was "in a fair way to find out something about poor Maude. She had been introduced to a new medium—a most wonderful man—if she could only tell me half the things he had done in her presence, I should not be able to help believing. The spirits had really made the room shake, and they had made all sorts of noises in the street outside, and they had made a footstool jump over the sofa. There *could* not be any deception in that. And she had asked them about Maude. They had not given her any answer then, but they had promised that she should have an answer hereafter. And she was *quite sure* she should, for they evidently knew all about it. Did I not believe *now?*" I promised that I would be present on the next favourable occasion. And shortly afterwards I received a note from Mrs. Langley, naming a particular evening on which the medium had promised to obtain the desired information for her, claiming the fulfilment of my promise and asking whether my father could be prevailed on to accompany us, as Mr. Langley had an engagement, though he hoped to meet us at tea afterwards.

The hour appointed for the exhibition was seven in the evening, and Mrs. Langley came to fetch us in good time. As we drove along the darkening streets, my father asked her what was the most wonderful thing that the spirits had ever done to her. She had not a moment's hesitation in answering—

"They took a five-pound note out of my pocket without my knowing anything about it," replied she.

"Ha!" said my father, "I have heard of similar

instances. How did you know that the spirits took it?"

"I have two reasons for knowing that it was the spirits," she answered. "First, because it *could* have been no one else; and, secondly, because they knew the number of the note, which I didn't know myself, and so nobody could have told them."

"They knew the number of the note!" repeated he.

"Yes; and they told it me, in the most good-natured manner, the very moment I asked them. There wasn't time to invent it, for it was a very long number, and began with ought, so that it was difficult to say it without a mistake."

"And did the footstool jump over the sofa for joy because the spirits had got your five-pound note?" asked my father.

I pressed his foot, as a sign that he was to behave well.

"Now, Mr. Derwent, you are laughing at me; but I don't mind; I shall have the laugh on my side soon. The footstool jumped over the sofa because that is the sort of thing which the spirits like best. Whenever they are left to themselves, they always do something with furniture. I don't know why, but they do. They don't seem to *wish* to answer questions—they only do *that* to oblige."

"When they were in the flesh they were all housemaids, I suppose," said my father, meditatively. "But when they do answer questions, they never make a mistake, do they?"

"Oh! never. If I have ever fancied they were wrong,

I have always found out afterwards they were right. There was my gold thimble. They said I had only one gold thimble, and I have two. But then I remembered afterwards that one of them is locked up and never used, and so they wouldn't think it worth mentioning. And they said Bertha's name was Bella. I thought at first that was quite a mistake. But then I remembered that one of her godmothers is named Arabella, and we thought of naming Bertha after her. So you see they were right in a way."

"But the first evening you inquired about Maude, the table said her name was Mary," suggested I.

"That was such a very little table," replied she, quickly, "it wasn't likely to know. The large table said her name right the very same evening. Oh! I do so hope they won't be stupid this evening, for I have set my heart upon making Mr. Derwent believe, besides learning something about poor dear Maude."

"Don't set your heart upon me," said my father, laughing; "I am a bad subject."

"But I suppose you will believe if anything happens which you can't explain?"

"I can't even promise that."

"Then," said she, "do you know, I think you are quite unreasonable."

We had reached the house of the medium, and as we got out of the carriage, Mrs. Langley, who was a great coward, whispered to me that she was very glad we had brought my father with us, for she was quite sure there was a very ill-looking man following the carriage. She had seen him in every street, and she was sure he was *trying to keep up* with us.

"Nothing could happen to us at this hour of the evening, and in the public streets of London," said I, cheeringly.

"But it's not natural, Miss Derwent, and I never like anything that's not natural. There he is again!" she added, grasping my arm.

A man, wrapped in a cloak, passed into the house before us, and went rapidly upstairs. "Oh," said I, "that explains it. It is only some one coming to the *séance* as well as ourselves."

We now followed Mrs. Langley, who was intimately acquainted with the ways of the house. She led us up the staircase, which was already brilliantly lighted, into a room which seemed at first, by comparison, quite dark. The windows of the room faced the west, and there was no light in it except the twilight after sunset. In the centre of the floor stood a large round table, covered with a dark-coloured cloth. Five or six guests, or spectators—I don't exactly know what to call them—were present besides ourselves. The operator, who seemed, as well as I could see in the doubtful light, to be a tall, middle-aged man, with red hair, whiskers, and moustaches, received us very politely, and requested us to be seated.

"You could not have come at a better time," said he; "the atmosphere of this room is literally charged with spirituality. The candles have just been extinguished by a spirit whose name I have as yet been unable to ascertain. We will light them again, but I have little doubt that they will be again extinguished, as it appears to me that this is a powerful and determined spirit, and likely to take the

lead in this evening's manifestations. We cannot do better than attend to his suggestions."

As he spoke he lighted the candles again, but they were immediately extinguished, the table rocking at the same time so violently that one of them was thrown down. Mrs. Langley screamed, and said that she had distinctly seen a hand, which appeared to emerge from the table-cloth and approach the candlesticks.

"Nothing can be more probable, my dear madam," said the medium, politely. "We must avoid offending *this* spirit, or there is no knowing what may happen. I beg you all to take notice that Mrs. Langley saw a hand. Did you see anything else at the same time, madam?"

"Yes," replied she, trembling; "I saw a violent movement of the table-cloth on the side farthest from us."

"Ah!" he said, "that was the withdrawal of the spirit. Mrs. Langley saw the withdrawal of the spirit. He is now in some other part of the room. We will try to ascertain where."

A low whistle from a table in the corner was accepted as the answer to this question. The medium then proceeded to address the spirit, and to exhibit several of the more ordinary manifestations, as they are called. I was beginning to feel a little wearied, when he suddenly turned to Mrs. Langley, and told her that the unknown spirit, whose violence had a little bewildered him, had retired for the present; and that if she would now put the questions she wished to ask, he had every reason to think that they would be answered.

XXI.—MARCO.

"I wish," said Mrs. Langley, rather tremulously, "to hear some intelligence of my step-daughter, Miss—'

"Stop," interrupted the medium (whose earthly appellation it may be as well to mention was Mr. Matthews); "do not mention her name, if you please. If you will all draw a little closer to the table, and sit with your hands in your laps, the lady's name will be written on several pieces of paper, and given to those among you whom the spirits may select."

We drew our chairs forward accordingly. My father was seated between Mrs. Langley and myself. Beyond Mrs. Langley were two ladies; beyond me two ladies and two gentlemen, all unknown to us, and not very clearly discernible in the half-light. We who sat in the centre of the room were near the table, which was rocking and quivering in a very surprising manner. There was a little movement of expectation among us, and the persons at the extremities of the row drew their chairs towards the table, and leaned forwards, evidently fearing that they might be excluded from what was about to happen. Mr. Matthews advanced towards us, and said, rather sharply, "Remain quiet, if you please."

Just at this moment a piece of paper was thrust into my hand, which lay in my lap. I looked up, and saw that Mrs. Langley and the two ladies beyond her had all received similar billets.

"If you will have the goodness to move to the window," said Mr. Matthews, "I think you will find that there is

still light enough for you to decipher what has been written. I am afraid of lighting the candles again, lest it should annoy the spirit, who objects to them so strongly, and who is evidently irritable. Though he is quiet for the present, I cannot be sure that he is out of the room; and if he were to return and give way to the same sort of excitement as that with which he began the evening, he might disturb us very much."

"I should give him in charge," whispered my father.

A sharp whistle from the table in the centre of the room gave notice that the disorderly spirit was present, as Mr. Matthews suspected, and that he was ready to interfere again if affronted.

"I wish I could get a sight of the fellow," muttered my father, trying to peer round to the side of the table on which Mr. Matthews stood. "I'd take a bet that he has curly hair and a turn-up nose. He whistles uncommonly like a street boy."

The rest of us had moved to the window; I, the last, trying to keep my father quiet. The three ladies were eagerly examining their papers. I looked at mine with no particular interest, feeling quite sure that I was about to see Maude's name, as nothing could be more probable than that Mr. Matthews was already acquainted with it. Little did I expect what I was really to see, and my astonishment was so great that I could not repress a start, and scarcely succeeded in keeping back an exclamation. These were the words on my slip of paper:—

"Do not say anything. Marco Rossetti. When and where can I find you?"

I thrust it into my father's hand, with a warning pressure, and began to interest myself vehemently and loudly in the papers of the other ladies. I scarcely knew what I said, but I felt that the only hope of getting any news of Maude was to conceal what had happened. To their hurried questions and remarks—"Had not you one too?" "I thought I saw it!" I replied, truly enough, "No; the spirits gave me nothing." And they were too busy with their own astonishment to notice me any further. Maude Langley's name—by the bye it was misspelt "Langly," not "Langley"—was written on each of their papers in a large, awkward hand, and in red ink. They were very much excited about it, and one and all of them accepted it as a proof that there were spirits in the room. I do not know why.

Mr. Matthews now desired us to return to our seats, and having informed us that the alphabet was "called for," he went through the process of asking questions and communicating the answers of the spirits, or acquainting us with their spontaneous observations, which is now too familiar to the attenders upon London *séances* to require description. During the whole of this time the room was in a sort of tumult. Tables and chairs were constantly moving, the floor was shaking, whistles, chirps, and raps were heard in every part of the room, and once a spirit played part of the "Ratcatcher's Daughter," on an accordion under the table, with a great many wrong notes. The skirts of our dresses were twitched, and Mrs. Langley felt a cold hand clasp her arm. I was so full of my own secret that I could scarcely attend to anything which

passed. I contrived to tear a leaf out of my pocket-book, and to write on it in pencil unperceived, "At half-past ten to-night; 23, Farnham Place." This I kept ready in my hand, so that I might take advantage of any opportunity. But I did not yet know which of the two men present in the room was Marco; and as both were tall and slight, I tried in vain to come to a conclusion. I trusted to the quickness which had enabled him to find me out and convey his note to me, more than to any manœuvres of my own. I felt almost sure that he was aware that I had written something, and that he would contrive to possess himself of it.

The information which the spirits vouchsafed to give about Maude was not very ample, but it was satisfactory as far as it went. She was quite safe. She would be restored to her friends. In the meantime it was better to make no further inquiries about her. A good angel was taking care of her, who might be annoyed if interfered with.

After Mrs. Langley's experience of spirits, it was not to be supposed that she would be at all surprised at the touchiness of an angel. It seemed quite natural to her. Her notions about the inhabitants of the invisible world were peculiar, but consistent; and similar notions to hers must, I suppose, be entertained, whether consciously or unconsciously, by all believers in mediums and spirit-rapping. They all seem to consider that spirits are characterised by a very remarkable degree of incapacity and flightiness, and that their imperfect attempts to convey information, or to perform any little exploit within their limited powers, are to be received with the sort of puzzled

admiration which we bestow on the learning of a precocious child, or the feats of a tamed monkey; it is all very surprising in *them;* it is such a good imitation of man; it is so much more than could have been expected from them.

It was now growing very dark, when Mr. Matthews suddenly said, "Look at the window! I shall pass across it presently. I am rising from the floor—I am being lifted. Do you not hear my voice above your heads? I am still rising—look!"

A loud creak was heard. "A pulley," whispered my father. "Ha!" said the medium, "did you hear that table?" The creak was repeated. "The spirits say that I am high enough now. Now you will see me pass the window."

A dark object like a man did assuredly pass across the window, about half-way between the floor and the ceiling; and at the moment when all were turning to look at it, I felt my hand gently grasped. I did not dare to whisper a word, for just then Mrs. Langley was close to me, but I slipped the paper which I had written into the hand which touched mine. I received a slight pressure in return, which satisfied me that I was understood. My impatience for the end of this scene can scarcely be described. I was hardly able to control it. After Mr. Matthews had descended to earth, he seemed willing to dismiss us, but Mrs. Langley and one of the other ladies were in a state of the highest excitement, and had so many problems to propose to the spirits that it seemed as if we should be detained till midnight. Mr. Matthews

advised me to withdraw, saying that there were symptoms of the return of that riotous spirit to whom he had before referred, and that it was impossible quite to answer for his behaviour. He had scarcely said this before there was an increase of the commotion which had been going on in the room with little intermission since the examination of the spirits began, accompanied by a perfect tempest of whistling, chirping, and rapping. Mrs. Langley screamed, and said that her arm had been severely pinched.

"Pray go, ladies," said the medium, anxiously. "We do not know what may happen."

"What a noise there was!" said my father, in a meek voice, at my elbow. "*I* chirped a good deal. But I can't do it as well as that fellow who won't give his name. He has had more practice."

I was thankful when we were outside the door, not only because I was wild for the evening to be over, but because I was getting really frightened at my father, who, between indignation and amusement, found it difficult to restrain himself. On the staircase I was able to exchange a hurried whisper with him, while Mrs. Langley was comparing notes with the other excited lady. "We had better say nothing about it!" whispered I.

"True," returned he, in the same voice. "As we are sure of his coming, we may keep the secret. But I shall make arrangements for detaining him, unless I am perfectly satisfied with his account of himself."

"If we were to tell Mr. Langley," said I, "he would of course come with us, and Rossetti hates him so intensely that our only chance of obtaining the truth would be lost.

I can't understand his wanting to see me unless he has a message from Maude, and I can't bear to put any obstacle in the way of receiving that."

"I think all that you say and a little more," replied my father, as he went forward to help Mrs. Langley into her carriage.

I looked in vain for Marco when we came out of the darkened room. Either he had remained with Mr. Matthews, or he had found some other means of leaving the house. There was nothing to be seen of him.

The hour which we were obliged to spend at Mr. Langley's seemed to me interminable. I secretly wondered and grumbled at the manner in which my father amused himself with conversation, as if nothing unusual had happened. He was quite past humouring Mrs. Langley's foibles, and expressed all the contemptuous indignation he felt at the exhibition he had witnessed.

"The nineteenth century," cried he, "the age of light and progress! I don't believe in such a thing as progress for the human mind. Facts slowly gather together till they are strong and numerous enough to destroy one shape of error; and the historian thinks it is a conquest; but only wait a little while and the error comes up in a new shape, and then you see that the majority of human beings had not the slightest perception that a false principle was destroyed, and that they have not the slightest power of appreciating the nature of evidence; not a whit more than they had when Dunstan sawed through the beams. Why, I would a hundred times rather believe that the bones of any good Christian were able to heal diseases than that his

disembodied spirit is capable of playing such disgraceful and ridiculous pranks as those which we have to-night witnessed."

This tirade was addressed to Mr. Langley, who ventured to agree with it, as his wife was at the other end of the room, making tea. No allusion was made by him to the special purpose of our visit to Mr. Matthews, and both my father and I felt that it was a subject on which we could not speak unless Mr. Langley introduced it. But, as I was wishing him good-night—how glad I was when the moment for doing so arrived!—he said to me, with a grave shake of the head, "We are still without news."

"My father thinks," answered I, immediately, "that it has been a mistake to take for granted that they were together. We cannot be sure of the identity of the two persons described to you at the farmhouse. And if they did *not* make their railway journey together, of course the description sent to the stations along the line would be likely to mislead—"

I stopped, for Mr. Langley's countenance darkened while I spoke, and I thought that he was disposed to resent the interference. He answered, however, with his usual gentleness, "I do not think there could be any mistake—in fact, I am *sure* there was not."

I could say no more. No one had a right to press him on a subject necessarily so painful.

We did not drive straight home. We went first to the police-office of the district, where my father stated that it was possible that he might be obliged to give a man in custody on a very serious charge, and asked for a couple

of officers to watch the door of his house. After a short conversation with the inspector, his application was granted, and we then hurried home. Not ten minutes after our arrival, the expected knock at the door made my heart leap, and immediately afterwards Marco Rossetti, with the invariable Giuseppe by his side, walked into the room.

XXII.—UNEXPECTED.

"Have you anything to tell me?" said Marco, grasping the hand which I scarcely extended to him, and speaking with a gasp, like a man who has endured so long that he is almost exhausted.

I was silent with surprise. My father advanced a few steps, and I made a sort of introductory gesture, to which Marco replied by a bow far more gracefully courteous than any acknowledgment which an Englishman could have found it in his heart to vouchsafe under the circumstances. Still holding my hand, he spoke again.

"Dear Miss Derwent, do not refuse to tell me anything you know. My search has been vain; surely you must be able to give me some light. I have been longing to find you. I saw your face at the carriage window this evening, and followed you—it is the first opportunity I have had. Do you know nothing, absolutely nothing, of her? I cannot believe you would hide her from me; at least, you will tell me that she is safe—at least, you will tell me that!"

His pale, worn face; his eager, supplicating eyes, his faltering voice, convinced me in a moment. But the con-

viction brought unspeakable terror with it. "Is it possible," I asked, "that she is not with you?"

"With me!" repeated he. I cannot describe the expression of his face. It was as if one glimpse of happiness had been given and withdrawn.

"But where, then, is she?" exclaimed I, turning to my father, who now addressed Marco in a very grave and decided manner.

"Mr. Rossetti, it is necessary that I should be very plain with you. We believe—we have reason to believe—that Miss Langley left her home in order to join you. Unless you can convince us to the contrary, we must hold you responsible for her disappearance."

Marco answered, mastering at once, when he spoke to my father, the emotion which he had allowed to appear in his manner to me—"I thank you for speaking plainly. I swear to you that I know nothing of her—nothing! Since the morning on which the news of her disappearance came to me, I have not ceased to seek her. I thought at first that it was possible she might have fled in despair from some fresh exercise of tyranny, and that she might intend to take refuge with me. I therefore remained in the neighbourhood, and watched, but to no purpose. Do you not believe me? What possible motive could I have for coming here if I were really guilty of this? *You* would call it a crime, but I only wish I *had* been guilty of it!"

My father and I looked at each other in mute dismay. I could not doubt that the evidence of Marco's truth was as conspicuous to him as to me.

"But who, then,—" he began.

Giuseppe broke out and interrupted. "What in the world is the use of all this turning and twisting?" cried he. "Don't we all know that old Langley has spirited her away somehow, and why should we be afraid to say it?"

"Do you believe me?" said Marco to my father.

"I cannot help believing you."

"I pass the phrase. I see that you believe without trusting me. If you knew me you would trust me. I will say more. If you knew *her* you would trust me. But you, Miss Derwent, who have lived with her, and who love her and pity her, you cannot be willing that she should be thus enslaved and destroyed. You *must* wish to help her."

"But what can I do?" said I, wringing my hands. "There seems neither hope nor help."

"At least hear me," continued he. "The little I know you shall know. I have one slight trace. I have hunted out, with infinite difficulty, the man who drove the carriage; he has been paid to hold his tongue, but he has told me a little, and I expect he will tell more. At any rate you shall hear what he has to say. Giuseppe, fetch him."

The boy was gone in a moment, and Marco explained: "I traced him from place to place, and found him at last here in London as a cab-driver. I suppose it was thought to be the best way of hiding him, and so it was; but a chance put me on the right scent, and I have got him, and he brought us here to-night."

My father did not seem to like the turn which affairs

were taking. "We must be very cautious," said he; "pray, Jane, be careful not to commit yourself in any way."

"Do not be afraid of me," said Marco, with that peculiar softness of manner which I had noticed in him before, and which always gave me the idea of an immense reserve of power. "I will hold you to nothing unless you wish to keep to it yourself."

"Here's the fellow!" cried Giuseppe, bringing the cabman into the room. "Now, speak up, my man, and you shall have as much rum-and-water to-night as any one else can drink between this and this day week. Do you always keep a couple of sentries at your door, governor?" added he, addressing my father; "because it's an unpleasant sort of habit in a free country, and I can tell you they seemed uncommonly inclined to lay hold of me when I showed my face at the door. Eh? no harm done!" The last words were spoken to Marco, who checked the boy by laying a caressing hand on his shoulder, and then desired the driver to tell us his story.

The man looked uneasy. "I promised not to tell the names of the parties, nor the name of the place—nor I won't tell 'em, but didn't promise not to tell nothing else."

"You were fetched on the afternoon of the seventeenth of January to drive two gentlemen from Llanefydd station to Parc Rhaiader," said Marco.

"The seventeenth of Jannerwary it wur, and the road you knows, but we won't mention any names at all, if *you* please, whether of 'owses or of parties."

"And you were paid afterwards to send the carriage home by another man, and to leave the country yourself?"

"Paid I was, 'andsome; and I did as I was paid for, and I never should have been found out neither, if you hadn't been the cutest beggar as ever I see in my life for a gentleman. The wery cutest!" added the man, with a strong look of approbation.

"Was there a lady in the carriage?" asked I.

"We didn't begin with a lady, Miss, but we got one afore we was done. We met her walkin' by herself on the road. So soon as ever the guv'nor as I was drivin' seed her, he calls out to me to stop—and him, and the man as was with him, gets out together, and goes on together till they comes up to the lady."

Marco's hand closed upon my wrist, and I could see by the breathless listening in his face that he was hearing this part of the story for the first time.

"And she came back with you?" said I.

"She did come back, but she wasn't willin' no ways. She begged, and prayed, and cried, and scolded. They had her between 'em, and between 'em they put her into the carriage, and they told me—well, it's no matter what they told me, but they satisfied me that I'd no call to interfere, tho' I was sorry for the young woman, I declare I was."

My father laid a sovereign on the table, and beside it he placed the photograph of the Langley family. "Will you show us in this picture," said he, "the gentleman whom you drove, and the lady who was put into the carriage?"

The man grinned. "I don't care if I do," said he, "for that's agin no promise that ever I made. There's the guv'nor, and there's the young 'ooman."

I need hardly say that he pointed out the portraits of Mr. Langley and of Maude as he spoke. He then took up the sovereign and added, with a wink at my father, "You didn't remember to mention the suvverin', sir, but that was a mere oversight."

"And this," said Giuseppe, suddenly placing before him a sheet of note-paper with a little landscape engraving at the top of the first page, "this is the place you drove them to?"

"Well, it's not unlike it," said the man, examining it coolly: "but if you knows the place, in coorse you can have no reason to ask its name." Then, looking at Giuseppe's mortified face, he added, with a broad grin and a chuckle, "Not so green, young gentleman, not so green! Howsomever, it wasn't a bad shot for a young hand, and you may grow up to be as cute as your eldest brother, if you live long enough."

Giuseppe put the paper back into his pocket with a forced laugh. He had tried it as a mere chance for surprising the man into mentioning the name of the place, thinking, as he afterwards said, that "one Welsh village was probably very much like another, and that his picture would do for any one of them."

"This 'ere gentleman," continued the cabman, still grinning and pointing to Marco, "he'll find out where she was took, if she was took anywhere. He's one o' them as can see without a hoptic nerve in spite of the

doctors, he can. Sharp! sharp! Now, I'll just tell you the way as he found *me* out. Fust he found out my sweetheart—nobody tell'd him I 'ad a sweetheart as I knows on, but he went and took it for granted, as being nateral and jestifiable—well, when he found her out, he come over her—that's what he did. He waits awhile afore he goes to her, guessin' that if he waits she'll have heered somethin' on me, unless I was faithless, the which I never was, and she *had* heered—and then, says he, 'Can I take a message to him?' that's how he puts it—and he inserts the idea that she shall send me a present, and that he'll take it. Lord love her, she was up in an instant! 'Do you know where he is?' says she. 'Oh, at his lodgings in Newgate Street," says he quite peart—for the moment she drawed out the letter as I wrote her, he takes note of the postmark, and makes a dash at it—'Doesn't he tell you to write to him with he—nishles?' says he. 'Yes, sure,' says she; 'D. F., Post Office, Newgate Street; and to tell nobody.' 'Ah!' says he, 'be sure you tell nobody, but give me the present, and write to D. F. by to-morrow's post, and tell him to expect me.' 'It's by Thursday's post he tells me to write,' says she. 'Very true,' says he, 'Thursday I meant.' And then up he comes and watches the post-office on Thursday, till he hears a poor innocent inquiring for a letter for D. F.—and then he follows me—but it's little enough he's got out of me, except admiration."

The astute Italian gave a momentary smile to the narrative of his stratagem, as if he had a little enjoyed it himself, and then dismissed the man. "If you are deter-

mined not to tell us where you took the lady, my friend," said he, "it is useless to keep you any longer. Wait for us outside—we shall be ready in a few minutes."

"And now," continued Marco, when he was gone, "you see how it is. There is but one thing to be done. I must immediately return and search the neighbourhood again; I have facts now to help me which I had not when I was seeking before. I feel sure that she is hidden somewhere in the country."

"I think it more probable that she was brought to London," said my father.

"No," replied Marco; "the publicity of the railroad stations would be avoided. Her—her distress" (he steadied his voice with effort as he said these words) "would have excited observation. Mr. Langley would not have inquired so fearlessly at all the stations along the line, if he had not felt sure that there were no means of tracing her there. What I have to ask of you is, that you will allow me to communicate the progress of my search to you, and that if anything occurs here which might possibly throw light on it you will let me know."

He looked from my father to me as he spoke. My father answered: "I don't know that we are justified in doing anything of the kind. This poor girl is only a child, and she is in the hands of her own father. However strange his conduct may have been, nobody has a right to interfere with it. Supposing you were to find her, Mr. Rossetti, what do you propose to do?"

Marco gave a slight laugh. "You must excuse my answering that question," said he.

"I am really very sorry for you both," said my father; "but I am afraid we must let it alone."

"Well," said Marco, quietly and proudly, "as you please. But I may state one thing to you—I expect to be able to prove at no distant day, that Lucia—that Maude—is *not* Mr. Langley's daughter. Unhappily, I must return to Italy in order to procure the proofs."

"Prove it," said my father, drily, "and you will stand in a very different position."

"As to position," cried Giuseppe, in a tone of high scorn and indignation, "he doesn't need to alter that; I suspect his position is a good way above your powers of comprehension, old gentleman. Come away, Marco," added he, throwing his arms around his friend in his demonstrative Southern fashion, and trying to draw him from the room. "Such cold-hearted help would have done you no good. Don't mind losing it."

The boy's eyes, as he looked up, had an I-wish-I-could-die-for-you expression, which conveyed, more forcibly than words, the idea of his entire devotion. Marco smiled at him, but did not move, and now spoke to me.

"I have not the slightest reason to resent distrust where I am not known. (Remember that, Giuseppe *mio*.) But *you* have seen enough of Lucia's sufferings to guess what they must be now. If I find her, may I say nothing to her from you?"

"Say to her," cried I, in strong emotion, "that I would do anything in the world to help and comfort her."

"I thought you were kind," answered he, a sudden light coming into his face. "See how it is, there is no one in Eng-

land to be her friend except you and me. I have only one higher duty in the world—it is this: if my chief calls me I must go—I am pledged to do his work; it is the work of my country; nothing must come before it. But it is hard to think that I may have to leave England, and to leave her so desolate and so helpless. I want to make sure that if this happens you will try to help her. I don't mean" (glancing at my father) "so as to get into any difficulty or any quarrel, I don't mean that you should try to oppose Mr. Langley if your laws don't allow it, but only this: that if once I can establish intercourse between you and her, you won't give it up; that if you are able to be her companion and comforter again, you will be; and that you will let me know what happens when I am away;—say that you will—I see 'yes' in your face."

I could not have said no, had I wished. He had taken my hands in his, and there is no describing the entreaty of his voice and his eyes. I know that my father was very much moved, though he did not choose to confess it, for he offered no opposition when I pledged myself to do thus much for the lovers.

"Add one more kindness," continued Marco. "Give me that photograph, it may help me in my search."

My father put out his hand for it, but I stopped him "No, no; it is mine," said I, "and I give it."

"You see, sir," said Marco to my father, "I am beginning to succeed already. Won't you bid me God speed?"

My father looked indescribably uncomfortable. It was not that he was in the least disposed to decide against

Marco on the merits of the case, it was simply that he thought it was no business of his, and wanted to keep out of it altogether. I suppose most elderly gentlemen would have felt the same. As he said afterwards, it was one of the oddest and most awkward stories that he ever came across in his life, and he did not at all relish the idea of figuring before the world as having aided and abetted in kidnapping a minor; more especially when the kidnapper was an Italian Red Republican, which, however, be it noted in passing, Marco was not, though it gave point to my father's lamentations to call him so.

He was now obliged to escort his unwelcome visitors to the door lest the two "sentries" should fall upon them. He came back with a half smile on his face. "I shouldn't wonder in the least," said he, "if that cab-driver, who must now, I suppose, Jane, be considered as ranking among the respectable acquaintances to whom you have introduced me, were to tell his whole secret to Master Marco before he has done with him. He had a most edifying expression of reverence in his face as he opened the cab-door."

"My dear father," said I, "I am afraid you are annoyed."

"Annoyed!" repeated he, taking me up, "who wouldn't be? A precious mess you have made of it amongst you. I'll have no more advertising for situations. I suppose the next thing you will do will be to bring me into friendly communication with Nana Sahib's grand vizier, and ask me to help him in making away with a dozen English babies."

"If you could only imagine the anxiety I feel about poor Maude!" said I.

"Oh, I dare say," he replied; "I'm too old to be interested in harlequin and columbine. I always take to pantaloon, and feel for his discomfitures as if they were my own. There is a fiendish brilliancy about your Italian hero which is the next thing to a nightmare. What between him and the spirit-rapping, I feel as if I might just as well be one of the mysteries of Udolpho myself."

"Well, it *has* been hard upon you," said I, "there's no denying it. But do just oblige me by saying that you think Mr. Langley's conduct utterly strange and inexplicable. Such a profound and continued piece of acting! And for what end?"

"*I* see nothing strange in it," retorted my father; "I think it was the best possible line he could take under the circumstances, with a foreign knave trying to get hold of his daughter, and an English dupe taking care of her. Depend upon it, that cunning old Gwythyr had put him up to the real state of the case, and when he saw Miss Maude on the road, he felt that his wisest policy was to make a flitting with her at once and hide her from friends and foes alike. Was he to be telling *you* what he had done, when he might see at a glance that you were wax in the hands of any hero of romance who chose to say, 'Please do!' to you. Of course he wanted to keep *you* in the dark. The only blunder he made was in giving his daughter up to you for six months; but as soon as he found it out he set it right, like a sensible, practical man, as he is."

"But he has been keeping his wife in the dark too," observed I. "*Imagine* his telling her—"

"Imagine what you please," said my father, "but as to keeping *her* in the dark, if you had the light of fifty noon-days fused into one, she wouldn't be able to see by it. No, no; there are only two people who have shown a decent amount of common sense from the beginning of this affair to the end, and those were Mr. Langley and the cabman's sweetheart."

XXIII.—HOW TO FIND HER.

[N.B.—As Marco's letters reached me very irregularly, and as his story was interrupted by many gaps, afterwards filled up, I think it best to give what now follows in the form of a continuous narrative.]

The first person whom Rossetti saw at the Paddington station was Mr. Langley. Marco was immediately on the alert. He had substituted a great coat, a woollen scarf, and a beaver hat for the cloak and cap which he usually wore, in order that he might not be recognised at a glance when he got down into the Clytha country. He now covered his mouth with the scarf, pulled the hat over his brow, and devoutly hoping that the inconvenient brilliancy of his black eyes would not betray him, set himself to watch Mr. Langley's proceedings. That unconscious gentleman having purchased a first-class ticket and a *Times* of the day, leisurely got into his carriage, settled himself in the corner, with a railway rug over his knees, and an unexceptionable portmanteau under the seat. Nobody who compared his dignified repose with the restlessness of the disguised figure watching him—his bland, open, intellectual countenance, as he smiled over his newspaper, keenly

relishing every little stab which its polished leaders inflicted, with the dark, flashing face of the other, as he stooped forward, pipe in mouth, to make sure of his game ere he betook himself to his own third-class carriage—could have doubted for a moment on which side the balance of respectability lay.

Every time the train stopped Marco kept a bright look-out, but Mr. Langley remained quietly in his place, and there could be little doubt that he was on his way to Parc Rhaiader. Of course he was going to make some arrangements about Maude which could only be effected on the spot. Marco triumphed inwardly over the good luck of the encounter, and resolved not to lose sight of his prey for an instant. He was unexpectedly baffled. At the distance of about twenty miles from Llanefydd station, a shock was felt by all the passengers in the fore part of the train, followed by a strong lateral motion of a most disagreeable and alarming kind. The outcry of the danger whistle sounded menacingly in the ears of those who understood what it indicated. Steam was shut off rapidly, and the whole train came to a stop, bristling with uneasy heads thrust through every window throughout its entire length. The usual official reserve as to the cause of the accident was nobly maintained. People who exercise a little brief (absolute) authority would rather die than give the real reason for anything. It was, however, quite evident that some of the machinery was out of gear, and that there would either be a long delay, or that the journey would be continued at some risk. Several of the third-class passengers jumped out, Marco among them; but he

drew back when he saw that Mr. Langley was making efforts to undo the door of his carriage, and calling vehemently for the guard. That individual came when it suited him, and no sooner.

"All right, Sir; there is no cause for alarm. We shall be off again in ten minutes."

But Mr. Langley was not to be appeased. He insisted on being let out, and averred that he was within easy walking distance of his destination. Marco might have supposed him to be speaking truth if he had not seen, by the ticket which he pressed upon the reluctant guard's acceptance, that he was really bound for the Parc Rhaiader station. Mr. Langley's cheeks were blue, and his lips white; no one who saw him could doubt that he was under the influence of extreme terror. When he was at last released from his imprisonment, he hurried down the slope of the embankment on which the train had stopped, as if he thought the engine was at his heels; stumbling repeatedly in his excessive haste. In the field below he paused and looked back. Two minutes of safety were sufficient to restore his composure, though not quite to give him back his natural complexion. He called out, in his usual voice, that his portmanteau might go on to Llanefydd station, and be forwarded to Parc Rhaiader House in the evening. When he said this, a man, who had been standing beside Marco ever since the accident occurred, turned suddenly, took off his hat, made a low bow, and ran down the side of the embankment to join Mr. Langley, saying, as he did so, "Good morning to you, Mr. Rossity, and a good day's sport!" It was

Gwythyr. As he joined his master, he pointed Marco out with a laugh, and the two went off together in earnest colloquy.

Any one who had seen the light which came into Marco's eyes when he found that he was recognised, and that his scheme for dogging Mr. Langley without being himself discovered was accordingly hopeless, would have said, "That is not an easy man to conquer." If there was a moment's disappointment, it was so momentary that it was invisible; nothing was to be seen but intense determination.

"How long shall we be detained?" said he to the guard.

"Well, sir, perhaps five minutes."

Marco looked at his watch, mentally surveyed the country, with which he had become well acquainted in the course of his search after Maude, made his calculation, and then sat quietly down on the edge of the railroad to wait till the train should be ready to move. He reckoned half an hour for the guard's five minutes, and found that he could still be at Parc Rhaiader, even allowing a slower than the average rate of railroad progress, fully two hours before it was possible for Mr. Langley to reach it. Whatever road Mr. Langley might select, he had a good five miles' walk before him. There was not even a village within a shorter distance. And, supposing him to be able to get a horse when he reached the village—not a very probable supposition—Marco knew enough of Welsh country ways to feel sure that a considerable time would intervene between the promise of the horse and its appearance in saddle.

and bridle. After this came a thirty miles' ride. But it was more likely that Mr. Langley would have to walk ten miles to the nearest town, and there provide himself with the means of finishing his journey. Marco noted his pace as he crossed the fields, and felt sure that three miles and a quarter were as much as he could manage in the hour. On his own part, something less than an hour would take him to the station, at which he was sure of finding some sort of conveyance to Parc Rhaiader. He laid his measures accordingly, and was patient.

They were off within the half-hour; they went at a better pace than he had ventured to hope; and when they arrived at Llanefydd, Marco's quick eye instantly perceived a gentleman's horse, in first-rate condition, held by a small boy. "You are waiting for Mr. Langley?" said he interrogatively.

"Yes, sir, please."

"He has been detained," said Marco, in his quick, authoritative manner; "his portmanteau is in that carriage; do you run and fetch it, and mind you are careful. He and Mr. Gwythyr will not be at the house till late this evening, and they will not come by this station, so it is useless to wait for them. Look sharp, now."

He mounted the horse as he spoke, gathered up the reins, slipped a shilling into the boy's hand, and rode off at full speed. The boy, without a moment's misgiving, took the portmanteau out of the carriage, and shouldering it, moved slowly off to the spring cart that was also in waiting.

"Who's the gent for Parc Rhaiader?" asked he of the guard as he passed.

"Don't know," returned the official. "Some friend of the house; I saw Gwythyr very civil to him. S'pose he travelled third class for a lark. Them young chaps often do when they're given up to smoking."

Marco never drew rein till he reached the house. It was rather a satisfaction to him to tire Mr. Langley's horse. He was fortunate in not meeting on his road any of the Clytha people, who might have recognised him. At Parc Rhaiader he thought himself tolerably secure. The establishment had been broken up immediately after Maude's disappearance; an old woman, not belonging to the country, but sent down from London, had charge of the house. His only danger was from the stable-helper, who would probably be in waiting to take his master's horse. One glance, as he rode up the sweep, told him that this man was a stranger to him. So far he was successful. He jumped off his horse, threw the reins to the surprised groom, and rang loudly at the door-bell, which was immediately answered by the woman in charge. "There has been an accident to the train," said he, repeating his true statement, "and your master is detained. Walk the mare about a little, she's hot."

"Are you come to stay, if you please, sir?" asked the old woman, as she civilly held the door open.

Marco walked into the hall. "I am not going to sleep here," said he; "I am come instead of Mr. Langley, because it was not possible for him to get here as soon as he wished. He was a little shaken by the accident, though not hurt. He may possibly not be here till the morning; and I have ridden on to spare you any unnecessary anxiety."

He was studying the old woman's face while he spoke, and making up his mind. As he passed on to the drawing-room, he suddenly turned, and asked her sharply, "Are there any letters for Mr. Langley?"

"There are some letters, sir, but Mr. Langley's own man has them—Mr. Gilbert."

"That is the person to whom I bring a message," answered Marco. "Send him to me, please."

The point which Marco was most anxious to determine was precisely this—whether Mr. Langley had any *chargé d'affaires* at Parc Rhaiader likely to be in possession of his confidence. He at once concluded that this Gilbert was the person who had taken part in the abduction of Maude, and that he was probably master of the situation.

"I am sorry to hear there has been an accident, sir," said a soft voice near him, while he stood deeply thinking beside the table spread with preparations for Mr. Langley's solitary dinner.

He turned and saw a most unexceptionable man in black, with nothing remarkable about him except the absence of all characteristics.

"Yes," said Marco; "but happily Mr. Langley is not hurt—only a little shaken. He will come on this evening if he is well enough."

"It is very important that I should see him, sir," replied Gilbert, in a cordially respectful manner, that was almost confidential. "I have news for him which he does not expect, and if you think there is any probability of his not coming on, I think, perhaps, I had better go and meet him."

Marco eyed him steadily, and felt convinced that the

man not only accepted him unhesitatingly as a friend of Mr. Langley's, but that he identified him with some individual friend who had special claims upon his duty. "Do you know me?" asked he, boldly.

"Well, sir—I think I'm not mistaken—Mr. Dennis. You was not expected till to-morrow, Sir, and though I've not had the pleasure of seeing you before, I think I may venture to say I know you."

Quick as lightning Marco changed his tactics. He knew Mr. Dennis's name well. He was Mr. Langley's partner; a young man, who had managed the South American affairs of the house for the last three or four years. He had recently come to England, and Marco was well aware that he was intended for Maude's husband.

He laughed, as if in appreciation of the other's cleverness. "You are a good guesser," said he. "I think you are in Mr. Langley's confidence, are you not?"

"Complete and full, sir," answered the man; "you may say anything to me without fear."

"These are delicate matters, my friend," rejoined Marco, "and I don't wish to say a word more than I can help."

"Sir, the delicacy of them is unimpeachable, and I should be sorry to press you. But, sir, I have had the honour to be of a good deal of assistance to Mr. Langley in recent arrangements, and, I assure you, you need not have the least scruple in relying upon me. Perhaps, sir, you will have the goodness to look at Mr. Langley's last letter to me."

He produced it as he spoke. Marco's cheeks burned as he took it. For no lighter cause would he have been

guilty of reading what was not meant for his eye, and he did it now with a sense of pain and shame which he could not repress.

Mr. Langley wrote, "I shall be down by the last train on Thursday afternoon, and I wish you to come to Parc Rhaiader to meet me. Mr. Dennis will arrive a day later. Do not mention this to Miss L. I have received your last report, and am quite satisfied with your arrangements, which are the best possible under the circumstances. Give the enclosed letter to Miss L. I trust it may prepare her to receive me in a better spirit. Take every opportunity of assuring her—and tell Mrs. Gilbert to do the same—that I have no object in view but her happiness. E. L."

Marco was looking at the address on the envelope with eager eyes, when Gilbert, who was evidently piqued with his apparent distrust, added, "And, sir, you will be very much surprised to hear what has occurred, sir, since I received that letter, and which makes it indispensable that Mr. Langley should be informed at once." He drew a step nearer and lowered his voice: "The young lady is here, sir. No other course was open to us. Typhus of the worst description broke out at the farm, and Mrs. Gilbert and I thought the best mode of avoiding publicity was to bring her here quietly after dark last night, as we could not take it upon ourselves to let her remain there."

Marco fairly staggered under this intelligence. He turned away his face that the other might not see how white he grew. He stood silent for a minute or so, inwardly saying to himself in bewildered joy, "Found! *found!* Here, here—in this house—in my power—I see

her—I touch her—I have her!" He had to put great force upon himself to make his concluding speech calmly and naturally.

"You did quite right, and I will answer for it that Mr. Langley does not blame you. Of course you had better take this news to him as quickly as possible. He was so much shaken that it is more than probable that he will not come on here, but if he does you will meet him on the road. Go to the Gwynne Arms, Kilgetty (naming a place and an inn many miles from Mr. Langley's road), and inquire for him. How soon can you be off?"

"In five minutes, sir." Gilbert knew how Mr. Dennis stood with his master, and was anxious to propitiate him. "Will you please to take any dinner? It is ready?"

To say truth, Marco was both tired and hungry, but he could not eat in Mr. Langley's house, so he declined the offer. He looked at his watch, and calculated that he had at least two hours free. "Don't lose time!" said he, rather impatiently.

"Not a moment, sir." As Gilbert left the room he turned to add the consoling words, "Mrs. Gilbert will be glad to see you here, sir. She is an old acquaintance, you know."

XXIV.—LOST AGAIN.

"Not safe yet," said Marco to himself. "It goes against me!" He called the man back. "Where is your wife?"

"Well, sir," in rather a deprecating voice, "just at this present moment, sir, she is probably in the kitchen, and

she would like to have a little notice, sir, to make just a trifle of toilet before she has the pleasure of seeing you. Mrs. Gilbert, sir, was familiar with the fine cookery department when she superintended Mr. Langley's household, and the woman here is not a very good hand at it, and so, as Mr. Langley is rather particular, she has undertaken to revise the dinner herself."

"Go to her," said Marco, breathing again, "tell her all that has happened, and ask her to remain where she is, and to let me go quietly to Miss Langley without being announced. I think if I am left to myself I can persuade her to look a little more favourably upon her father's arrangements. In fact, to tell you the truth, Gilbert, I am not sorry to have the opportunity of stealing a march on Mr. Langley, and speaking for myself. I may venture to say thus much to you, as you know all about it. I want to plead my own cause in person, you see. Tell your wife, please, to come when I ring the bell, but not sooner, and I flatter myself she will find rather a change in her young lady."

He put a sovereign into Gilbert's hand as he spoke. Poor Marco, he had not many of them! "A free-handed gentleman," thought Gilbert to himself; "just as I expected to see him." Quite won by the little confidence, he gave Marco a significant nod, and quitted the room, saying, "I understand, sir; I understand. Nothing mollifies a young lady so much as a little courtship. Miss Langley, sir, is in the small room upstairs that used to be Mrs. Irvine's bedroom, sir; we thought it better not to *have* her on this floor, sir, lest any one should come in

promiscuously, and see her; but, of course, sir, with you it is different. The second door to your right, sir, at the top of the stairs. Good evening, sir. I am sure I wish you success. I shall be off in five minutes."

He lighted a candle for Marco as he spoke, and withdrew to the kitchen. Marco waited till the door was closed after him, and then went upstairs. His heart beat so fast that he was fairly compelled to stop once to take breath. He dreaded the shock of joy for Lucia, yet there was no way of breaking it to her, and delay was simply loss of time when every moment was precious. Very softly he turned the handle of the door, and, opening it about an inch, looked in. The room was empty and dark, but the door communicating with the bedroom within was half open, and the firelight shone through it, making spaces of wavering brightness upon the carpet. He stole in, keeping carefully in the shadow of the door, and looked into the bedroom.

Lucia was sitting upon the rug before the fire. The glow trembled upon her face and gave it a fictitious bloom, which faded as fast as it arose, and left her cheeks pale as if seen by moonlight. She wore only a white dressing-gown, and her profuse hair was about her shoulders. She had been sitting there, or wandering aimlessly about the room in her old fashion, since the morning. She had literally not had the spirit to finish dressing herself, nor to light the candle and seek any pretext of employment as the night closed in. What little food she had taken had been brought in to her where she sat. A plate lay on the table near her, its contents scarcely tasted. She was much

changed. The hands, which lay clasped upon her knees, were quite thin; the features were fallen; the touch of grief had left its dark impress beneath her eyes, making them look unnaturally large. She looked as if much more of this kind of life would subdue her altogether; as if she might be made in the end to submit to anything; as if heart and soul were exhausted. If she heard any slight stir in the outer room she took no heed of it. No change, no comer, could bring any hope to her!

Marco feared to show himself, lest she should think that he was an apparition; feared to speak without showing himself, lest she should break out into madness before his eyes. He went up to her in a moment, and clasped her so closely in his arms that her first cry was stifled on his breast. "Lucia, my darling, my own! I am here to take care of you, and all trouble is over!" This was what he said, and he hoped that she would hear and understand it before she fainted, for he knew that she would faint. Then he laid her gently on the floor, sprinkled water on her face, chafed her hands, and softly called her back to life, not ceasing to speak the tenderest and most cheering words, so that she might awake to the sound of them, and understand as quickly as possible the joy that was come upon her. When she began to revive, he soothed and caressed her as if she had been a little child. He placed her in a chair; he wiped away with loving hands the tears which poured in sudden downfall over her cheeks; by-and-by he was feeding her with a playful pretence of utter helplessness in her, and talking all the time, telling her how he had found her, explaining what was to happen

to her. For some time she was quite unable to speak; she could do nothing but accept him as a great, delightful, miraculous fact, which had changed her whole life. If he had any previous doubt what to do, her aspect and her behaviour would speedily have determined it. It did not need her clinging gestures and imploring tones—her terrified clutch upon his arm if he moved away a little—her wide wild eyes of pitiful appeal, to convince him that she must not be left another half-hour to wait and suffer. It was glaringly manifest that the trial had been above her strength; the only fear in his mind was that he had come when it was already too late. He was obliged to silence all inward questionings about the future with one unanswerable argument—that the evil of leaving her was greater than any possible evil which could come from taking her away. And this being so, the strong will which habitually ruled his being, relaxed a little, and he gave himself up to the rapture and the passion of the Present, and looked neither before nor after.

Time pressed. As soon as she was able to understand and to act, he made her dress for a journey as quickly as possible, taking nothing with her but a small bundle of necessary clothing. Then they took off their shoes, stole noiselessly downstairs, and across the hall into the drawing-room. As they passed the kitchen door, they could hear two female voices in animated conversation. Gilbert was already gone, and his wife and the woman of the house were at tea together. Marco closed and locked the drawing-room door, and then he and Lucia went out at the window down into the woods.

They had twelve miles to walk in order to reach a little fishing-village on the seacoast which was to be their first halting-place. Marco was terribly afraid of over-fatigue for his companion. He carefully regulated their pace, and he would not allow her to walk for more than an hour without stopping to rest. It was a warm night in early spring; no wind was astir; the soft, star-sprinkled darkness hung over them like a shelter, and gave them a sense of safety by circumscribing their view within narrow limits; the odours of growing wild flowers and grass beset them as they went with tenfold the fragrance of the daytime. They said little, but kept close together. When they stopped to rest they went aside out of the path, and Marco sought out some spot well screened from the airs of heaven or the eyes of casual passers, and there made Lucia lie down and rest her head upon his knees. Once or twice she slept a little, whilst he watched her. She did not feel one moment's fear; but if she had feared, a single glance up at his face, so full of strength, love, and reverence, would have reassured her. Neither of them ever forgot a minute of that night: it remained with them, not so much as a picture or a memory, but as a secret place in the soul which might be opened and entered at pleasure. It was only necessary to shut the eyes, and undo the curtain which severed it from common life, and they could go in, and walk on, step by step, minute by minute, side by side, as they had done. And the vague but intense feeling of the time, which superseded all possibility of thought, will come back too, and thrill the quiet atmosphere of later years with the irresistible light of youth. That light comes back some-

times to all, to show what has been lost or missed. Even in his old age, the scent of the early fir-woods shall bring a message from the past to Marco, and make him cast down his eyes lest others should notice the tears which rise in them; and then he shall see before him the faint first twilight of dawn stealing between the stems of the trees, and hear the soft, regular note of the wood-dove, like the pulse of the woodland's heart beginning to beat before sunrise, and watch again the lovely sleeping face upon his knees, and wonder what is in store for him and for it, as if he knew not. Well for him that as the whole of that night renews itself before him there is not a thought in it which he need be ashamed to remember.

At Tal-y-Sarn, the village of which we have spoken, Marco hunted out a friend among the fishermen on whom he knew that he could count. Marco had the love for marine adventure which is innate in all Sicilians, and which his Montevideo experiences had tended rather to foster than to diminish; and during the weeks which he had spent in and about Clytha, he had made many an expedition to Tal-y-Sarn.

He had an instinctive knowledge of men which seldom failed him, and a gift of ascendancy which he employed all the more effectively because he was hardly conscious of it. The fisherman was ready to do whatever he wished in a moment, and to ask no questions about it. He gave them as good a breakfast as he could, and while they were eating it he got his boat ready. They were off from the little pier a good half-hour before any one else was astir in Tal-y-Sarn. "Where are we going, Marco?" asked Lucia,

nestling beside him while he held the rope, ready to let the boom go as soon as they fairly felt the wind. It was the first time she had asked the question.

"We are going to Ireland," answered he, in a whisper.

He was not as communicative to his fisherman friend. To him he merely named a port on the Welsh coast which was a few hours' sail from Tal-y-Sarn, and where he intended (though he did not say so) to get a passage for Ireland. He thought it best to leave as few traces of his course as possible; for, as he afterwards said to Lucia, when cautioning her on the same subject, "If you don't tell a man a secret, you may be sure that it is safe with him; but you can't be quite sure if you do tell him."

They reached the port before noon, and took a friendly leave of their boatman, who obstinately refused to accept any payment for his services. It was not that he was particularly magnanimous, or superabundantly rich; I am afraid that he was quite capable of overcharging people whom he did not like upon occasion, and I am sure that the mode in which he spent his earnings, whether legitimate or not, would not bear severe inspection; but, somehow or other, Marco was a sort of hero in his eyes; he looked upon him as a natural captain of all possible fishermen and other marine light troops of various kinds; he had seen him handle a boat under difficulties; he had heard some of his stories of perils in Southern seas, and some of his songs which had a Southern flow and fervour about them strangely fascinating to the ears which could not understand them; he knew him to be kind of heart and open of hand, and he strongly suspected him to be poor in purse.

Add to this that the presence of the unknown lady gave our fisherman a good hope that he had been helping his hero in some little enterprise not exactly in accordance with law and custom, and his romantic disinterestedness will perhaps be intelligible. It was assuredly convenient, for Marco's heart could not but sink when he thought of the very slender stock of money with which he was about to begin housekeeping.

"What shall I do with you, *carissima*, while I buy provisions and see about our passage?" asked Marco, as they stood together on the shore, and watched the manœuvres of their friendly boat while she tacked and shook out her sails, and went slowly out of the bay.

"Take me with you," said Lucia.

"I am afraid you will be so tired. Could you not sit here and wait for me? or shall we go to one of those cottages and ask them to let you rest?"

Lucia began to tremble. He drew her hand further through his arm, and held it caressingly in his own. "What is it?" asked he.

"I do not think I can let you go—not yet—not even for a few minutes. I feel sure—sure—sure that I should lose you! I should be taken away, or you would not be able to come back, or something would happen. Oh, no, no, no! Marco" (clinging to him), "don't leave me, don't go away—I can't bear it!"

"I won't leave you for a moment," answered he, in a reproachful voice, as if she wronged him by supposing it to be possible that he *could* do so if it were to give her pain. "Sit down, darling! How you tremble! You

will be brave when you have had a little time to forget all you have suffered."

"I shall never be brave enough for *that*," murmured she, as she sat down upon the shore. In a few minutes she told him that she was strong enough to go with him, and they went together. They were lucky enough to find a large schooner bound for a port on the southern coast of Ireland, and getting ready to start in an hour. She was laden with coals, and she was to bring back a cargo of potatoes. Marco easily agreed for their passage. Then he picked out an honest-faced man among the crew, gave him a list of articles to be purchased, and promised him half-a-crown for the commission. "After all," said he to Lucia, "it is the safest way. Who knows that I might not be recognised, and reported by some one, if I were to show myself in the streets?"

Their passage was quick and easy. It was a pleasure-sail to Lucia. "I feel as if the last two years *could* not have been real—as if they did not happen," said she. "They seem so far off and so faint."

"Forget them altogether, *amor mio!*"

"If I do not dream of them I shall soon forget them; but I am almost afraid of going to sleep, lest it should all come back. Marco, do you know why I think it must be intended that we should be happy? Whenever the happiness comes, it seems natural; from the very first moment it seems to be my own, and it feels so durable, I begin to be used to it at once. But the trouble seemed to me false and impossible, and I never submitted to it for a moment. Oh, Marco, if I *had* submitted to it—*if I had given you up!*"

"It would have made no difference to me, Lucia; I should not have given you up!"

"But I should have wronged you, and you would have despised me."

He drew her to him with a peculiar smile. "No," said he, "I should only have thought that the trial was too much for you without me, and that your body had given way under it—not your heart,—I am sure of that! You would have been mine again as soon as I claimed you.'

XXV.—A HONEYMOON.

Marco and Lucia were man and wife.

There was no difficulty about the marriage. Both were nominally Roman Catholics, and everybody knows that a Roman Catholic marriage in Ireland is an easy matter, requiring neither banns nor register. Marco went to work in his usual manner. He haunted the chapels till he found a priest whose face he could trust, and then sought him in private, and told as much of his story as was necessary, and no more. The great point was, that Lucia Valdesi, the bride-elect, was a Roman Catholic, and that her family were Protestants. Elopement and clandestine marriage were thus presented in the light of religious duties, and sanctioned accordingly. Marco was married under his real name, but he changed it immediately afterwards as an additional security against detection. He also made a circuitous journey from the town in which the wedding took place, and finally established himself with his young bride, under the names of Mr. and Mrs. Bennett, in a second floor lodging over a small stationer's shop in G——.

The real difficulties were to come. His first business was simply—to live. His little stock of money was almost exhausted; he had no more than wherewithal to pay for a week's food and lodging. Like many other refugees, he had lived by teaching while he was in England, and hard work he had found it when there were only his own expenses to be provided for. His own habits—and Lucia's also, till the last two years—were very simple; it was impossible to reduce the wants to be supplied within narrower limits. They hired a single room, and divided it by a curtain of coarse serge; they asked for neither cooking nor attendance, but did for themselves all that they needed, Marco assisting in both departments with an amount of energy and skill that would have astonished an English professor of mathematics. Mathematics and Italian were his two accomplishments, and he announced in the shop-window that he was ready to teach them at a shilling an hour, and to attend pupils at their own residences. In the mornings, when the scanty breakfast was finished, he went out to seek or to give lessons; in the evenings they sat in the dark, to save the expense of candles (as greater than they have done ere now), and talked, and were happy. The first pupil was a great triumph. Marco was in such transports when he found that the negotiation was succeeding—it took place across the counter in the little shop—that he could hardly help running upstairs to tell Lucia in the middle of it! When he did tell her, she clapped her hands for joy. It was a certainty of three shillings a week (he had promised to give four lessons for it), and, as Lucia said, with sober triumph, it was the be-

ginning of an income. She proposed to add some sausages to their bread and maccaroni on the strength of it; but Marco took out his purse and showed it to her, and she abstained. Soon after this he obtained another pupil, and then a school, which promised him a pound a month for two entire days' teaching in the week! And here his success came to a pause. Like many another working man he now earned, in the sweat of his brow, just enough to live upon, and no more. Nothing for a rainy day; nothing to lay by; bare sustenance and shelter, and a gloomy prospect of want of clothes in the future. Gloomy did I say? You should have seen their faces! If ever the perfect light of happiness shone upon earth for a few short weeks, it shone there!

Gradually Marco laid aside the hope of saving enough to pay for their passage to Italy. That had been his idea originally, and for that he would gladly have laboured with all his strength, and beyond it. He had, as he told Miss Derwent, evidence of importance to collect, for which his presence in Italy was absolutely necessary. It was for this reason, and because of his extreme poverty, that he had not intended to take Lucia to himself at this time, if he had not been driven to do so. He had hoped that it would have been possible for her to hold out till he was able to claim her. As soon as he saw that it was not possible, he cut away that hope with his own hand. But the alternative was worse than he had expected. For the present every door seemed closed. The fetters of circumstance were heavy upon him, and he could neither break them nor undo them. He silenced with a strong will the

voice within which questioned him, sadly and impatiently, "What is to be done?" He resolved that the question should not be asked again till the answer was ready. But it only took a new shape, and the importunate voice asked him where the answer was to come from, and he knew not. He put the trouble aside—he could do that as often as it came up—but every time that it came back it had grown stronger, and he felt that it would master him at last. Then he set himself a fixed time. For six months he would work every vein, try every channel, and keep himself patient and sanguine. At the end of that time he would ask himself once more, "What is to be done?" but not till then. And, in the interval, he would be happy, and would make Lucia happy. He did not make this resolution a moment too soon, for her face was already beginning to reflect the gravity of his. That he was determined should not be—there life should never conquer him—on that one point he would be master. The trouble should slay him before it touched her.

So in the intervals of his work—leisure much enjoyed though little desired—he taught her, for her anxiety to improve herself in order that she might be a companion for him was unbounded; and in the evenings he walked with her, and at night they sat in their dark chamber and talked. Talked of heaven and earth, and of that fairy-land of fancy which is neither; of the far-off Past, the strange, wild, lonely life in South America when they were together, and were all in all to each other; of the quiet Italian days, when they were separated, but were all the world to each other still; of the time to come, when

Sicily should be free, and they should live together among their own people, and be all the world to each other for ever. And in the midst of it all came a strong prosaic want which could neither be dismissed nor supplied: Marco wanted shoes, and had nothing wherewith to buy them. It was hard, but there was no escape from it. To live in Paradise, yet to want shoes and not to be able to get them: Marco, poor fellow, would gladly have gone barefooted; and indeed that arrangement might have seemed more compatible with the habits of Paradise than the patching and mending which had already taken place, till there was nothing left to be patched and mended. But he was morally certain that his bare feet would not be thought consistent with an adequate knowledge of mathematics, and that he should lose his pupils by them. Half-a-guinea was the smallest sum for which he could hope to provide his feet with coverings strong enough to resist the wear and tear of daily walks through the streets to attend pupils, or to look for fresh engagements. Half-a-guinea beyond their daily expenses—a free, superfluous half-guinea—a half-guinea of supererogation—was a bewildering idea! It transcended the limits of conception; it made him giddy to think of it.

"Lucia, sit still—do not stir," cried he suddenly, after sitting for half an hour in the silent depth of a reverie; "I am going to take your likeness."

Lucia smiled and became motionless. She was sitting near the window at work; but when Marco uttered his decree she had just lifted up her head to look at him. In that posture she froze till his word melted her again. In

that posture greater artists than he might have desired to take her likeness.

Marco hunted about for materials. He had received, only a few days before, a couple of packages, containing the small amount of worldly goods which he had left at his London lodgings. Giuseppe had sent them to him as soon as he had ventured to open communication with Giuseppe. Pencils and papers were somewhere he knew; his drawing formerly had been just one of those half accomplishments which are always to be "taken up" at some future time. At last he found what he wanted, and set to work.

Lucia was very patient, and so was he. After much labour, and many erasures, he produced a sketch of which they both approved highly. Lucia was released from her durance, and permitted to come and criticise it with him.

"Now," said he, "I have got a little bit of red chalk, and I shall rub some colour into the cheeks."

"Oh, Marco! but I am so pale."

He looked at her. She *was* pale. The full outlines, the glowing tints were gone. Marco's very soul sighed within him as he thought that scanty nourishment had caused the change. But he said, "Ah, you have never quite recovered those two dreadful months when you were lost, Lucia *mia!*

It was almost the first time they had spoken of it. By tacit agreement they avoided in all their conversations any mention of the times of Lucia's sufferings. She herself desired to efface and to forget them; and Marco could hear no allusion to them without a sense of self-reproach, as though he ought to have been able to prevent them.

This portrait was the beginning of a new trade for Marco. He showed it to the stationer and his wife, and prevailed on them to sit to him. Two very indifferent likenesses were the result, and these were exhibited in the shop window, and inscribed, "This style five shillings." His desire for concealment made him afraid to exhibit Lucia. He felt quite sure that if he were to do so, some one who had known her in former days would pass the window directly and recognize her.

His first "real sitter," as Lucia phrased it, was a young shopkeeper, going to be married, and desiring to surprise his *fiancée* on her birthday with a welcome portrait of himself. He was as unpromising a subject as could well be imagined—pink, featureless, and inane. Marco worked hard at him, and desired as ardently to produce a satisfactory resemblance as ever Rafäel desired to embody the "*idea che aveva in cuore.*"

At last it was finished, and when the patient rose to depart after the operation, Lucia was somewhat dismayed by hearing him ask, "What price?" and by Marco's immediate reply, "Three shillings, if you please."

The sum was paid, and the sitter withdrew. Marco stood bending over the table, and making little ineffectual improvements in his drawing, which was to be sent home in the evening, when Lucia came to his side.

"Why did you take so little?" asked she. "Five shillings would have just made up the price of the boots."

He looked round at her with a deprecating smile. "I *couldn't* ask it," he said. "Look, Lucia! this is such a vile drawing!"

"But that is his fault for looking as he does. I am sure it is very like him—all, except the mouth," added she, with some hesitation.

"I would not so much mind the mouth not being like his," said Marco, mildly, "but, you see, it isn't like a mouth at all, and that is a serious objection. I *might* do something to the corners perhaps," looking at it doubtfully and anxiously.

"Oh, take care, Marco, that is turning into a dimple, and he hasn't got dimples."

Marco burst out laughing. "What an artist I am!" cried he; "I shall stipulate for all my future sitters being drawn in respirators. Well, never mind, Lucia *mia*, three shillings are not to be despised, especially when you don't deserve them."

Lucia was grievously distressed that she could earn nothing herself. She kept the room in order; she mended clothes; she accomplished successfully all the cooking that they required; but she earned nothing. Again and again she pondered in her heart the same weary subject. What could she do to swell their slender purse while Marco was away? Once she gained a little by keeping shop during an illness of the mistress of the house. But Marco, though at first he laughed at her occupation, and rewarded her with many caresses for the sum which she proudly poured into his hand at the fortnight's end, forbade a repetition of the attempt. Even in that short time several new customers, objectionably polite in their manners, had begun to haunt the shop. Lucia's superb beauty was not to be *kept* in the background. It might be hidden altogether, *but it could* not be seen and yet unnoticed.

At last she discovered a way. She could teach reading and writing to little children. When this thought came into her head her delight was immeasurable. She immediately prepared a statement, in the largest and grandest letters that she could achieve, "School for little children. Terms very low," and ran downstairs into the shop with it. She thought she would call it a school at once; it looked better. "See!" cried she, holding up her bill before the eyes of the stationer's wife. "This is what I am going to do now. Doesn't it look well?"

The woman turned to her with a good-humoured smile, and was quite relieved to find that the new project was one to which she might accede. Half-a-dozen times in the last fortnight poor Lucia had rushed downstairs to ask advice about something which she thought she could do. She had proposed plain sewing, glove-making, shoe-binding. She had asked whether it would be possible for her to take in washing; whether she could get employment in any manufactory in the neighbourhood; whether she could go out to cook anybody's dinner while Marco was away, and come back in time to receive him. Her habit was to sit still and think intensely; then, as soon as the thought of any trade or labour possible for a woman came into her head, she ran downstairs to ask "whether she could do it." Her landlady felt bound to discourage the needlework schemes, for she knew the market in that particular department to be just then so thoroughly overstocked that it would have been cruel to allow so unskilful an operator as poor Lucia to enter it. She had not been able to refrain from laughing at the utter impracticability

of the other suggestions. But she was really sorry for the young wife who paid her rent so regularly, and seemed so unaffectedly anxious to obtain the privilege of labour; and it was a pleasure to her to be able to sanction and assist this new attempt.

It was not quite a failure. Four or five small scholars gradually assembled, and Lucia had the unspeakable happiness of helping Marco. But what strange work it was for her! And how it tired the impatient, ungoverned temper, which never showed itself to Marco, but had never even tried to hide itself from anybody else! She knew her fault, and she knew that he was aware of it, and she made her confessions to him in the evenings with curious honesty.

"Marco, I slapped a little boy this morning."

"Oh, Lucia!"

"I did, indeed; and I am very sorry, but *really* I could not help it. You have no idea how tiresome he was. I should not in the least have minded his making mistakes, but he was so dreadfully conceited. He *would* spell 'boy' with an *i* instead of a *y*, and he said he knew he was right; and when I told him it was wrong, he sneered at me, and then I slapped him. Are you very much shocked?"

But as time went on, other confessions came.

"Oh, Marco, I was so good to-day! I kept my temper in the most beautiful way. You would not have believed it if you had seen it. They were all naughty at once, and I was not cross to one of them. Once I felt that I was going into a passion, and I got up and ran behind the

curtain in a minute. I came out again as soon as I had got the better of it, and there they were all of them looking so surprised and puzzled that I couldn't help laughing. And after that everything went on so nicely, and two of them begged my pardon before they went away."

But still they did not achieve much more than mere subsistence, and there was only one half-crown laid by for the Italian journey.

XXVI.—A VICTORY.

"Marco, I have something to say to you."

He started—he did not know that she was in the room. He was standing in the window, intently reading a letter, the cover of which seemed to be scribbled all over with directions and postmarks, and which he thrust into his pocket at the first sound of her voice. She did not notice the action, but clasped her hands about his arm, and stood beside him, looking up into his face with a gay smile.

"You have such a martial expression," said she, "you never look the least bit peaceable or safe except when you are talking to me. You always remind me of that line of Scott's—'clearing war's terrors from his eye.' It must be very uncomfortable to go through life feeling as if one were always in a battle."

He smiled. "Never mind my expression," he answered; "tell me what you have got to say to me."

"It is a very wise, humble, reasonable speech, and I do hope you are going to attend to it. It begins with a question. Are we not very happy?"

She laid her cheek upon his arm and waited for his reply. It did not come instantly, but she was too confident to be alarmed by a little silence. If she had not been absorbed in the thought of what she was going to say, she must have noticed the deep, suppressed sigh in his voice, as he answered, "Very."

"Well, then, why should we want anything more? I do not care for being poor, and I am sure you don't. By-and-by, if we go on prospering, we shall have saved enough to go to Italy, and there, you know, we can live upon almost nothing. Why should we think any more about my fortune? Let us leave it to Mr. Langley. I am your wife, you know, and he can't take *me* away from you; so let him have the money, and then he will be satisfied. I am sure he will not even wish to disturb us, if we write and tell him that he may have the money."

Still he looked down upon her in silence, and now she began to perceive that something was amiss. "What has happened?" asked she, anxiously.

"Something for which we have always longed, Lucia *mia!* something that I have hoped, and striven, and dreamed, and lived for. Yet now it is come, I am so weak that I stagger under it as if it were a great blow."

She is listening with white lips, and he turns away his face while he speaks.

"Cannot you guess? Say it, and spare me! What is the only thing in the world that could take me away from you for a little while?"

Her clasped hands shake upon his arm, but she says nothing.

"Lucia, my darling, be brave!" Now he looks back to her, and a flash comes to his eye, and a smile to his lip, as he determines to shake off the weakness that was mastering him. "This is joy, though it is by a little sorrow that we purchase it. Just a little brief time of sorrow. In a few months I shall come back and take you to a free home in a free Sicily!"

He took the letter out now and read it to her, and tried to make the truth plain before her bewildered eyes. The summons which he had so long expected was come; he was called to join that wonderful Marsala expedition which is now history, and will be some day a legend. No doubt as to his duty in the matter crossed his mind for a moment. His word had been pledged again and again; but even were it not so, his whole life, his every thought, his best inheritance, were all pledges. It had never occurred to him as possible that there could be anything in the world which he ought not to sacrifice to his country. But he had not guessed, till the sacrifice was demanded, how much it would cost him. It was very nearly his life.

Still she did not speak a word, and he began to tell her that he had planned an arrangement for her protection during his short absence. He never alluded to his departure without adding some word to show that it was for a very little while. The superintendent of a neighbouring convent had consented to receive her. He had confided to this lady so much of her story as to make it apparent that this act of charity was an absolute necessity, and that it might possibly prove a very good speculation in the end.

"You will have shelter, and care, and kindness, dearest, and must think only of—"

What was this? With a cry she fell at his feet, and clung round his knees—"Oh! no, no, no, Marco!—it is pretence—it is not truth—you are cheating me; but I don't believe it! I am not deceived for a moment! No, no, I know so well—*so* well—that it is not true! You would never leave me—I know you would not—you could not! Ah, Marco! ah, my own, my darling! don't try to make me think that you could bear to leave me! It would kill me—think of that! I should not live a week. It would be so cruel, so wicked, so false! Oh, forgive me for saying a word about it, when I know it is impossible! Don't I belong to you—didn't you take me for yourself—is there any hope, or comfort, or life for me in the world except you? Take them back, take them back—the words that you never meant, and that I did not believe you when you said them! Say that you are going to stay with me—always—with your poor, poor Lucia, whom you are a little fond of, are you not, darling? You don't want her to die—now—here—this minute! Ah, how could you—(trying to laugh)—how *could* you frighten me so?"

He had lifted her up, and she was clinging to him still, taking his face in her hands and kissing him. "God help me!" said he, as the tears broke from his eyes.

"There—you've given it up—it was only just for a moment you thought of it. Oh! it was very cruel to think of it even for a moment. What? Why do you look at me so? Don't—don't—you'll take away my

senses! Stay with me—don't desert me! Is there anything in the world that ought to come before your wife? Stay with me, Marco, take care of me, keep me,—oh, it's only a little while! I know I shall die, and not be a burden to you any longer. You have half killed me today! Ah, darling, darling! don't be angry with me, I didn't mean it, I never meant anything that could vex you for a moment! Only if you go away I shall die—or go mad—that's what I meant, and that's true, you know it is. Oh, give me your word—promise me—just say to me once that you won't go!"

She was at his feet again—and he said it!—in a tumult of passion, pity, and sorrow, hardly knowing what he said. Those arms about his knees—that wild, white, despairing face lifted to his, and loved by him better than anything else upon earth—that torrent of entreaty and reproach overpowered him—and he promised!

She made him say the blessed words again and again, she poured her caresses upon him, sobbing all the while, till she was completely exhausted with agitation, and was obliged to yield to his entreaties that she would go to bed and try to sleep. During the night she started up several times, repeating her supplications that he would not leave her, and wringing her hands and weeping. He was always awake and ready to soothe her, and towards morning she slept more calmly. At breakfast, before he went out to his work, she tried to begin the subject to him again, forcing a smile, and making as if she wanted to talk it over quietly, as the dwellers in one house are apt to talk over matters near to their hearts, if there is full sympathy

and affection among them. But he stopped her at the first word, lifting his hand and speaking with a brevity and decision which she had never encountered from him before.

"Not a word!" said he. "The name of Italy must never be mentioned between us again."

She literally dared not say any more; and the rest of their conversation that morning had a chill and a shadow upon it. When he was gone a sudden fear occurred to her and grew upon her through the day. Perhaps he was not dealing truly with her? Perhaps he fancied that he should soften the blow to her by seeming to yield for a little while; and then perhaps he meant to go away by stealth, without taking leave of her, mistakenly thinking to spare her pain by this stratagem? This thought oppressed and fevered her. The oftener it recurred, the more probable and the more terrible it seemed. At last she began to say to herself, "Will he go to-day? Will he not come back this evening? Have I seen the last of him?" She searched the room to ascertain whether he had taken any of his property with him, and finding all as usual she was appeased for a little while. But very soon she remembered how easy it would be to send after him anything that he might require, how unlikely that he should have taken anything with him if he really wanted to deceive her. Then she recalled every word, look, and gesture since he had given his promise, and tried to find a meaning in them which should either confirm or destroy her new terror. It was easy to read them into confirmations. He had seemed colder than usual—that was be-

cause he was suppressing his grief at their approaching separation. He had forbidden the subject of Italy—that was because he feared to betray himself if he spoke of it. Above all she remembered, that as he left the room, he had turned and looked at her, standing still for a moment and fixing his eyes, "as if," thought she, "he wished to fix the picture in his memory. Oh! there is no doubt of it. I am deceived and abandoned. It is all over." She hurriedly put on her hat and shawl, and having ascertained by reference to his memorandum-book that he ought to be engaged at his school, she went out determined to inquire for herself whether he was actually there or not.

Nothing but the instinctive fear of observation prevented her from running when she was once in the streets. She walked as quickly as she possibly could. She was not quite sure of her way, but she asked it and made it out by degrees, saying bitterly to herself as she did so, "Ah! this the first time I have been in the streets without him —the very first time. It is the beginning—it will often happen now!" It was three miles to the school, but she had no sense of space or fatigue. When she reached it, she opened the iron gate which divided it from the street, and stole round the house on tiptoe, as if she was afraid that the sound of her footsteps might betray her, cautiously glancing in at the windows as she passed. She thought that the school-rooms were probably at the back of the house, and she was not mistaken. The windows were open, and in a moment she recognized Marco's figure. He was standing at a desk, delivering a lecture to his class, ranged in a double row before him, and looking as

uncomfortable and unsatisfactory as boys generally do when they are undergoing a similar operation. Marco's face was pale and severe, and as Lucia looked at him she distinctly perceived that he had lost for a moment the thread of his discourse. He paused, put his hand to his forehead, and resumed with an air of haste and vexation. Just then a boy stepped out of the ranks and said something, making a sign with his hand towards the window. Lucia felt sure that she was discovered, and she turned and fled like the wind.

She ran till she was out of breath, and then stopped, not knowing where she was. She reproached herself for the absurdity of her vague fear that she was pursued, and stood still a minute or so calming herself, and waiting till the violent palpitation of her heart should cease. A man, respectably dressed, and with an air of quiet civility that was almost gentlemanlike, came up and spoke to her.

"I beg your pardon, Madam, but I think you have lost your way?"

Lucia was still panting, but she answered as quietly as she could, "Thank you; what is the name of this street?"

He told her; and pointing to a large building enclosed within high walls, and having blind windows in the only story which was visible, he added, "That is the Convent of the Nuns of the Sacred Heart."

Lucia uttered a faint cry as she remembered that this was the name of the convent to which Marco had proposed to consign her during his absence. A kind of insane notion that she was about to be entrapped against her will took possession of her, and she began to walk

away from the convent as fast as she could. The stranger kept pace with her.

"I think you have been frightened," said he, gently; "can I be of any service to you? I know this town well, and can easily direct you to any place you may wish to find."

She stopped and looked at him. There was an expression of quiet pitying interest in his face, and his manner was perfectly respectful. Lucia tried to remember the name of any street from which she could find her way home, but she was bewildered, and the effort was fruitless. She had no natural "organ of locality," and had always been accustomed to look to Marco for guidance. She asked herself whether this stranger could have any possible motive for misleading her; whether she could do herself any possible harm by betraying the place of her residence, and having answered both questions in the negative, she told him where she wanted to go. He continued to walk with her for about ten minutes, during which the way was intricate and might have been difficult to find. Then having put her into the right road, and explained to her very clearly and carefully how she was to proceed, he took a courteous leave of her. The slight vague fear which she had felt vanished entirely when she perceived that he had no wish to accompany her home, and that he had asked her no question beyond the name of the street which she was seeking. She hurried on, and reached home a little before the usual hour of Marco's return.

The man who had accosted her hurried home too, and wrote the following short letter, which he dispatched by that evening's post:—

"DEAR SIR,—

"My progress has been quicker than I hoped when I last wrote to you. Having traced them to G—— I followed them, but there lost them, and was unable to ascertain whether they had left the place or not. Your hint that the gentleman might probably be found engaged as a mathematical or Italian teacher was of great service. I had made a round of the schools, finding out through servants the mathematical or Italian tutor's day, and watching the doors, of course taking care not to be suspected. I was for some time unsuccessful. I was certain, of course, that they would be here under a feigned name, but at first I stupidly concluded that it would be an Italian name. It occurred to me that I might be mistaken on this point, as you mentioned the gentleman's perfect knowledge of English, and to-day I watched a school at which I found that a mathematical teacher, named Bennett, attended twice a week. I missed his going in. I was hanging about the gates when they were entered by a lady, whose resemblance to the photograph was so striking at first glance, that I was on the alert immediately. In two minutes she came back, running as if in great alarm. I followed her; accosted her; satisfied myself that she is Miss Langley; ascertained the street in which she lives; shall find out the house to-morrow; and wait your further instructions. Her manner was wild, and quite favours the idea that her mind has been a little upset.

"I remain, dear Sir, yours very sincerely,

"DAVID WILDBRAHAM."

"To Everard Langley, Esq."

XXVII.—AFTER VICTORY.

As soon as Marco came home, Lucia told him her terror. His face darkened when she touched the forbidden subject, and he answered her, shaking his head—

"No, Lucia. I deserve to be suspected, but I am not so false as that. I have given you my word, and nothing can change it, unless you give it back to me. Be satisfied."

She had intended to press for a repetition of his promise, but she felt that she could not. Silence seemed a necessity. But she was safe now. A great sense of repose and triumph filled her heart. Nothing could take him away from her, and she wanted nothing in the world except himself. She had conquered; she had gained her point; she was satisfied. Again and again she looked at him during that evening, with a strange momentary tremor, which terminated in exultation. Was it possible that she had been so near to losing him? Was it true that she had him still? She felt as though they were meeting for the first time after a long separation—as if she could not do enough to celebrate the joy of their reunion. Painful memories, sudden misgivings, doubts, terrors, reproaches, started up in the midst of her love, and made strange disturbances in its course, which all dispersed as they arose, and seemed only to deepen its flow, and force it onwards with a stronger pressure. She beset him with a thousand tendernesses; every accent of her voice was a thanksgiving; the little services of home were offered to him like worship. Never had his manner

been gentler to her—never fonder. She was too much absorbed in her own feelings to notice the unwonted gravity and languor which pervaded it, or if she caught a glimpse of them, she instantly turned away her eyes.

In the morning he went to his work at usual. But not as usual did her thoughts revert, during the hours that he was away, to each little incident of their conversation while they were together. There was something about him which she did not like to think of, though she had no clear perception what it actually was. He was pale; he had not slept well; he was a little absent. Perhaps he was going to be ill. She would watch him more closely than ever. In all illnesses the first symptoms were those of most consequence. No harm should come to him which could be prevented by any self-devotion of hers.

He came back. He was very tender with her. There were no pauses in their conversation at dinner. He began at once to tell her all the little occurrences of his morning, and to demand a similar report from her. Afterward he brought the books which they had been reading together, and busied himself more assiduously than usual with her studies. Then he proposed a walk. She withdrew to get ready. As she put the curtain aside before she returned to him—it was a noiseless door and did not betray her approach—she thought she saw him sitting at the table with his face dropped down upon his extended arms. *Thought* she saw, for there was an expression of such despair in the attitude that she could not bear to look at it for a moment, or to believe that she had seen it, and

with a quick impulse, about which she did not reason, she gave the curtain a shake, and struck her foot upon the floor, and he was up and by her side at once.

Their walk was silent at first. Some vague weight about her heart kept her from speaking. He was the first to shake off constraint and begin to talk. But she could not get rid of her sense that there was a change in him. She thought that she was nervous and fanciful; she determined to struggle against the oppression that was on her—to disregard, to defy it. She tried to speak to him playfully and gaily, and as she did so, she felt for a moment as if she hated herself, and must be hateful to him, and she stopped in the middle of a jest, appalled. He did not seem to notice that she had broken off with a sentence half finished; he did not ask what she was about to say; he was content to leave it as it was. An angry thought started in her. He had no right to be so indifferent. Afterwards she looked at him anxiously, and ventured to ask him whether he felt ill. "No—quite well; don't watch me so!" he answered, for the first time speaking to her with an accent of impatience in his voice.

The next day it was worse. If a chance visitor had spent that day with them he would have said, "How happy that husband and wife are together—how devoted to each other!" He would not have said—he could not have dreamed that the strength of each was giving way beneath a secret burden, too heavy for it to bear. Marco surrounded her with the same ceaseless and loving attention in which she had been wont to find her happiness; she answered it with the same flow of tenderness. But

there was a barrier between them, and she could not hide it from herself any more. He sank into thought and roused himself, and she dared not ask him what he had been thinking. She began to feel sure that he was miserable; surer still that she was incapable of comforting him. This stern, haggard face, on which no passing smile had been seen since he pledged his word to her, was not Marco's. She had kept him, but he was not himself. And this frightened, anxious, hesitating woman, who watched him so eagerly, yet dared not speak a word to him of what was in the hearts of both—surely this was not herself. Where was their union? They were more separate than if he were on the other side of the world; more separate than if he were lying on that far-off Sicilian earth, of which she hated to think, with his life leaving him through a deep, irremediable wound, but with her name on his lips, in his heart, with his soul. She drove the thoughts from her with a kind of fury, and told herself that this was only a passing trouble, and that after a few days of patience all would be again as it was. Then she slipped her hand into his, and asked him if he was angry with her. "No, darling, not with you!" He answered with a smile so wan, so painful, that the gravity which had settled upon his face before was a thousand times to be preferred to it. But, in a moment, the struggle—yes, she could no longer doubt that it was a struggle—was resumed, and he took the volume which they had been reading, and proposed to go on with it. She felt a sudden disgust with the book, as if it helped to separate them; she could scarcely resist her inclination to seize it and fling it into the fire.

There was not one single subject of which they could speak without trenching on forbidden ground. Everywhere the spectre met them, and everywhere they fled from its presence before they had seen its face. She had not been aware before how deeply this one idea was interwoven with the fibres of their life. She thought it was like a nightmare—like a monomania. Why should it be thus to her? What was Sicily to her, compared with him? *She* did not think that she had made him sacrifice his duty, otherwise she would not have asked it of him. *She* knew and was sure that his duty to the wife, who had no hope or help on earth except himself, was higher than all others. It was cruel of him to make her feel in this manner. Yet what had he done? Where was the fault? She could not say or think that he was giving way. She had nothing to charge him with, except a change in his face, and in his voice, which he could not control, if he would.

She dreaded now that time of darkness when they were used to sit and talk together. She shrank from it. Hitherto it had been like a labyrinth of gardens through which they could saunter, plucking a new flower at every step, and never knowing how much sweetness and beauty the next step would bring. Now it seemed like a prison—no escape from it—nothing to hope for in it. This was an impossible thought to fasten itself upon any hour which they two were to pass together; it was a crime in her to have harboured it for a moment. What was she worth if she could not make his home happy to him? There were wounds in all hearts; she must only be careful not

to touch the wound in his (Who had inflicted it? Ah! that question must not be asked?), and it would heal of itself. She would go back to the old South American days—to the girlhood and boyhood—those were safe recollections. At first they seemed so. He responded to her freely enough when she talked of their sails upon the lake—of their rides over the pampas. He was tender and sympathetic in his reminiscences of "poor little Lilia." He sat with his hand in hers as he used to do, and his voice sounded to her like the familiar voice of former times.

"I remember," said she, "when Uncle Rossetti—"

"Ah!" it was not an exclamation, it was a cry of pain, and his hand sprang from hers as if she had struck him. "Ah! my father!"

He stood up. His self-control was over for the moment. "Forgive me, darling!" said he in a quick, unsteady voice, "I am going out for something I have forgotten; I won't be long," and he was gone.

She tried to sting herself into a sense of wrong while he was away. Everything was more to him than her love. If he could be thus stirred—thus saddened—while she was giving up her life to him, he could not love her as he used to do. He had never loved her as she dreamed he did—never as she loved him. But there was another aspect to this thought. It came: it stayed; she could not get rid of it. He did not love her as she loved him; he loved her more nobly. She was a part of himself, and he was ready to sacrifice her for duty. And still more. He was beginning not to love her as he did. That was to be

the end of it, and the beginning was already come. She could not partake his thoughts, his aspirations, his regrets. She had shut herself out from them. They were not for her. Nay, she was in opposition to them. She was not a helpmeet for him. She was a hindrance—a clog—a degradation!

Lucia wept passionately over this thought, but tried to drive it away, and would not submit herself to it. She felt where it was carrying her, and *there* she would not go. She bore it one day longer. All through that day she felt the severance between them with an agony which she deserved, but which was punishment enough for her fault. Her untrained, undisciplined, unsubdued heart had indeed led her astray; but there was a light in it which would guide her back, which would force her back, whether she submitted to it willingly or not. In the evening she looked suddenly up at him, after a long silence. As she did so his eyes were withdrawn from her. But she read in them a pleading expression which went deep into her heart, as though he had been silently asking her to give him back the self-respect of which she had robbed him. She rose and flung herself upon his breast. "Take back your promise," said she, "and give me back your love!"

"My Lucia!" folding her to him, "was I hard with you?"

"No, no, no! kind, tender, noble—too good for me now and always. I hate myself—I am so unworthy of you. I am going to be your real wife now, Marco, and you must forget that I was ever anything else."

He was willing enough to forget it. Never to the end

of his life could he think of those four days without intolerable shame and self-scorn. He almost wished to die in the first battle as an atonement. And now the floodgates were opened, and some part of what had been repressed poured forth, and Lucia saw, shuddering, what she would have done if she had not yielded. Now she was again the depository of all his hopes, the companion of all his aspirations. Those four days had been good for her. They were so much worse than any grief which followed, or could follow, that the remembrance of them sustained and strengthened her. Any desolation was better than that desolation. There was a kind of happiness in the very intensity of her sorrow now. It was endured for him. And she had seen the truth, and could not look away from it. She knew now how much worse than death life was capable of being made. She was so brave through the coming trial that she amazed him. She *would* not be spared; her comfort was in being tried. She shrank from no preparation; asked for no delay; made no objection. Perhaps she might have failed again —in strength, not in purpose—if the time had been prolonged; but it was very short; so short that when she cast herself upon her face in her little cell at the convent, and knew that she had seen the last of him, and wished that she could lie there till he came again, it seemed to her only an hour since she was lying upon his breast, and telling him that he might leave her. She did not repent that moment. But oh! with what anguish of remorse she thought of the four days during which she was false to him! False to him! She had no softer name now for *the weakness of* her great love.

XXVIII.—LAYING PLANS.

[NOTE.—Jane Derwent's journal is here resumed, but the Editor of her papers has thought it best to continue to the end the form of narrative which was adopted at Chapter XXIII.]

As soon as Mr. Langley discovered that Maude had for the second time escaped, he began a new line of tactics. The second search was quite free from the reserve which had characterized the first. He advertised immediately in the London and local papers, and he wrote both to Mr. Derwent and Colonel Seyton in a tone which, if not apologetic, was at least explanatory and self-justifying. He was of course quite ignorant of the interview which had taken place between Marco and the Derwents, and he was therefore not aware that they were able to confute the only statement contained in his letter which, as we shall see presently, was not strictly true; that is to say, they were able to bring his statement face to face with Marco's, and to decide which of the two they would believe. And on this point the father and daughter decided differently. Mr. Langley had unconsciously given the opportunity for that interview between Marco and the Derwents by a little manœuvre of his own. Being, as we know, about to leave London and go down to Parc Rhaiader, and being not a little embarrassed by Mrs. Langley's pertinacious inquiries about Maude, and not a little afraid that if she continued to pursue them in his absence she might somehow obtain a clue, he had thought to quiet her mind by means of her faith in the spirit-rappers. A private hint to Mr. Matthews, suitably enforced, secured such an an-

swer to Mrs. Langley's appeals as would effectually prevent her from making any further exertions in the matter. It so happened that Marco was just at that time trying to discover Jane Derwent, and to establish some means of communicating with her privately. Chance favoured him. On the evening in question he saw her face at the window of a carriage, and tracked her to the house of the Medium. Once there, he trusted to his wits to devise a mode of communicating with her, and we have seen how well he succeeded.

Of Mr. Langley's two explanatory letters, that which he addressed to Colonel Seyton was the fullest, because he was more anxious to retain that gentleman's good opinion than to acquire a position with the Derwents, which he perhaps felt that it would be very difficult to make good, and which, socially, was of less importance to him. This letter we give entire.

"My dear Seyton,

"Your interest in my unhappy daughter's fate was so genuine and so active, and it must have appeared to you at the time that I met it so coldly, that I have a kind of satisfaction in being now able to explain the whole case to you, though the ability comes from a new misfortune. When I saw you that morning at Parc Rhaiader, I had already a trace of her, which for many reasons I thought it well to keep secret even from you. I was, perhaps, over-cautious, but you will easily understand how painful the subject was to me, and how glad I was to avoid discussing it, even with an old friend. Besides, my hope of

following the clue which I had obtained seemed to depend entirely on secrecy. I had a most subtle antagonist in Rossetti; and I thought to mislead him by carrying on two lines of action at the same time—one open before the world, the natural, self-evident course with which my friends would be acquainted, and in which they would assist; the other secret, and determined by the information which I had secretly obtained. And I thought that the best mode of accomplishing my purpose was to leave those who were busied with the open line of action really in the dark as to the secret line. But, as I disliked throwing dust in *your* eyes, as I felt that it seemed a little unhandsome and unfriendly to allow *you* to waste your exertions, I discouraged you as much as I could from taking any trouble in the matter; and afterwards I reproached myself for having incurred the appearance of ungraciousness, by my anxiety to avoid the reality.

"I was not mistaken in my hope. Very shortly after saw you at Parc Rhaiader, my poor girl was in my hands again. If secrecy had been important before, it was doubly so now. The influence which that rascal Rossetti had obtained over her mind was—and, alas! is—absolute; he and his emissaries were about the country in all directions; the only possible plan of saving her seemed to me to be to get her to the Continent without his knowledge, and with all practicable haste. I had all my arrangements made, and should have put them in practice long ere this,—when of course I should have immediately acquainted you with the facts,—but the state of poor Maude's health was an insurmountable obstacle. Her nerves had been utterly shaken.

She kept her bed. It was out of the question to think of a journey for her at present. I had her in kind and tender care, and under skilful medical treatment. Even my wife did not know that I had found her; for when this serious illness commenced I was anxious to spare Mrs. Langley the distress of knowing it; and I continued to think that the wisest policy which I could oppose to Rossetti was that of leaving all the persons whom he would suppose to be acquainted with the place of Maude's retreat in ignorance of it. The illness was not dangerous, it was only sad and tedious; amendment had already begun, and I left London and came down to Parc Rhaiader in order to ascertain in person whether it was practicable to move her—when, at the last moment, I am baffled. She has succeeded in escaping from the persons who had charge of her, and she has again fled with Rossetti. I say nothing of my grief and horror—you will understand them. All hope of saving her good name is now at an end; but she herself may yet be rescued from the misery of living at the mercy of this unprincipled adventurer, and to this end all my efforts will be directed. It may be possible to buy him off; I shall, at least, attempt it. You are at liberty to show this letter to Mrs. Seyton; there are no secrets now in this miserable business. If you have any advice to offer me, I shall be very thankful for it. Believe me always,

"Yours most faithfully,

"EVERARD LANGLEY."

Colonel Seyton growled and grumbled a little over this

letter, and then handed it over to his wife, who was sitting opposite to him at the breakfast-table. She read it to herself in silence till she came to the account of Maude's second flight, which took her fairly by surprise, and she dropped it, clasping her hands, and exclaiming—

"Oh! poor dear Maude!—Mordyn, I mean; a family in narrow circumstances, my love, for whom we are very sorry."

Her husband thought at first that she was going out of her mind, but he speedily discovered that it was only a little manœuvre for the bewilderment of May the younger, who made the third at the breakfast-table, and who was considered by her mother to be under the age at which it is proper for girls to know that there can be such a thing as an elopement. Little May looked very quiet, and would not have asked a question for the world, but she knew perfectly well that something had happened to Miss Langley which mamma did not wish her to know.

"Suppose I were to go out of the room, mamma dear?" suggested she, after a pause; her tender delicacy being hurt by the idea that she might possibly be in the way.

Mrs. Seyton was too deep in the letter to attend to her. "Go out of the room!" cried her father; "what in the world should you do that for, when you have only just begun your breakfast? I can tell you I expect to see you finish that loaf!"

Little May looked at it thoughtfully, and, being confused in her mind by the mention of narrow circumstances in connection with Maude, of whom she was very fond, wondered whether Miss Langley was hungry, and whether she *might put a piece* of bread by for her secretly.

Mrs. Seyton had now finished the letter, and she could not refrain from making comments upon it, which she took care to couch in language perfectly unintelligible to her daughter. "I think," said she, "it was extremely foolish of the Mordyns not to take *us* into their confidence. I am sure if *we* had been consulted, we might have prevented this second case of sheep-stealing."

Her husband was hopelessly confused by her calling Mr. Langley "the Mordyns," and he gave up the attempt to understand her. "I would rather wait," answered he, "till you are *not* obliged to make an allegory of it. I'm a dull man."

When the time for talking it over came, he said that there was certainly a little more *finesse* about Langley than quite suited his taste, but that every man had a right to manage his own affairs in his own manner, especially when the affairs were of such an uncomfortable sort. He was very sorry for the girl, but he must own that he now thought it would be better to let her go, and make the best of it; if only they could make sure that the fellow would marry her; and of that there could be little doubt, as her fortune was so large. It was quite clear that she *would* have him. If he ill-used her, why it was no more than she deserved; and if it came to such a point that they must needs separate, her father could come forward to protect her. But the best thing for all parties now, in his judgment, was to hush up the scandal as much as possible, and let her go. Still it was natural enough that Langley should not relish being conquered; and it *was* uncommonly provoking, to be sure, that this scamp of an

Italian should get the money. He could not wonder at her father trying to prevent *that.*

Colonel Seyton changed his view, however, when Mr. Langley informed him, some time afterwards, that his worst fears about poor Maude were realized.

"The fellow has imposed upon the poor child by an illegal marriage," said Mr. Langley, "and now he has deserted her."

"Upon my soul!" said Colonel Seyton, "that is a pitch of villainy beyond my imagination! Where is she?"

"He has left her in a convent in G—," replied Mr. Langley, "and he has gone back to Italy."

"Does she write to you herself?"

"No; I doubt whether she is yet aware of the treachery which has been practised towards her. You know her infatuation. There is only one course, however, for me. I am off to Ireland. I shall take immediate steps for annulling the marriage; for the present I think Parc Rhaiader will be the best place for poor Maude, though I must bring her to London in the first instance. I am in some difficulty as to the best mode of dealing with her. Sometimes I think that I will take Miss Derwent with me, for whom she has a great affection. I fear that there may be some repugnance on her part—on Maude's, I mean—to returning with me."

"I don't think Miss Derwent a judicious person," said Colonel Seyton, very decidedly.

"No; she showed considerable want of discernment and firmness. But the question is, what can I do better? Mrs. Langley has not health or nerve for such a

case, and Maude was never fond of her. Bertha is too young—"

"Unquestionably," said Colonel Seyton.

"Yet she must have some female companion. I don't know in what state I shall find her. I cannot guess yet how far it may be desirable, or even possible, to tell her the truth. I really feel as if I should want a woman with me; and I could hardly take a stranger."

"Would Miss Derwent consent, do you think?"

"Well," returned Mr. Langley, with a slight, peculiar smile, "I don't think she has any option in the matter. The terms of our agreement bound her for two years, and she must feel that she has been treated with a good deal of consideration and indulgence. The fact is, I make great allowance for her. I think she acted with excellent intentions; but there is, of course, a view of the part which she acted—and a view of which she must be perfectly well aware herself—which, if brought forward, would effectually prevent her from obtaining any future engagement as a governess."

"There is no doubt of *that*," said Colonel Seyton, who had never forgiven Miss Derwent for her "sentimentality," as he called it, and who entertained considerable doubt whether she ought ever, under any possible circumstances, to be permitted to be a governess to anybody.

"Then she has great ascendancy over Maude—"

"Great ascendancy! but how will she use it?"

"I don't see how she could use it mischievously under present circumstances. Rossetti is in Italy. I want nothing of Miss Derwent except a little soothing and sym-

pathy for poor Maude, and perhaps she will do that work all the better for her very defects of judgment. She is a conscientious woman, and, of course, I shall exact a promise from her that she will not allow herself to be made the medium of communications between the lovers. And after that I shall feel safe. Maude is not in a state to bear bracing treatment just at present. We must temporise a little."

"Well, you are the best judge," said Colonel Seyton; "and, indeed," he added, a little reluctantly, "I do *not* see what else is to be done."

Mr. Langley had no difficulty in making the arrangement which he projected. When Jane Derwent was told that Rossetti had imposed on Maude by a false marriage, and deserted her at the end of six weeks, her horror and indignation were unbounded. In the first flush of these feelings she gave up at once all faith in Marco, reproached herself bitterly for the part she had unintentionally played, and desired nothing so much as to atone for it by helping to rescue Maude. She agreed to start at once with Mr. Langley, who, whatever his other motives may have been, was quite sincere in his desire to attain his object with as little pain as possible to Maude. He was also quite honest in his opinion that a marriage with Rossetti was a fate from which his daughter should be saved by any possible means, and that her happiness would be secured in the future by marrying her to the rich and respectable Dennis, against her will, if her will could not be subdued. And, strange to say, Mr. Dennis was willing to overlook the elopement if his *fiancée's* consent could be obtained now, or at any time before she should come of age.

"I don't feel sure that the Sicilian hero is quite such a black sheep as you think him after all, Jane," said Mr. Derwent, before he wished his daughter good-bye.

"My dear father! and for all these weeks you have been telling me how absurd I was to believe his story in preference to Mr. Langley's!"

"No doubt Mr. Langley's was the safest side to take," replied Mr. Derwent; "but still there is something to be said for the other. There always is something to be said for a reprobate, if you look into him thoroughly. How do we know that he knew enough of English law to be aware that his marriage was illegal?"

"But he has deserted her; is not *that* proof against him?"

"I don't feel so sure that he *has* deserted her. He *may* intend to come back again. Respectable English husbands sometimes take trips to the Continent without their wives."

"Really," said Jane—"*really* there is never any knowing *what* view you will take. I suppose if I were never to say a word about anything, you *might* form an opinion of your own and keep to it."

"I advise you to try that plan," said Mr. Derwent.

XXIX.—THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

Mr. Langley was not a man to inflict unnecessary pain in the pursuit of his objects. Neither was he a man to shrink from any amount of pain, inflicted or suffered, which seemed to him to be necessary. He would have carried Lucia off by the straightforward means of a search-

warrant and a body of police, if he could have got possession of her in no other manner. But he would always have regretted the violence, and would have considered it rather a reproach to himself that he had been unable to accomplish his end without it. Moreover, he was not a man of strong nerves, and this he knew well. He was careful to avoid any scene which might entail upon him a recurrence of unpleasant images. He would not have heard a scream for the world; for he knew that if he had any share in causing it, he might hear it again on sleepless nights. He had a great many fears. He was afraid of bodily pain; he was afraid of going mad; he was afraid—deeply and unceasingly afraid—of dying. He kept the strictest possible watch upon his own health; he knew its weak points; he dreaded an illness. Well was he aware that there was a dangerous half to his mind—a set of memories, misgivings, and anticipations, which sometimes showed themselves for a little while and greatly disturbed his comfort. He had power over them now in a general way. He could not always prevent them from appearing, but he could always refuse to receive them when they appeared. But he was not sure that he should be able to exert this power effectually under the enfeebling pressure of bodily sickness. He had a kind of secret feeling that some day he should perhaps break down. Nothing annoyed him more than that any symptom or threatening of disease, of which he might be dimly and reluctantly conscious himself, should attract the observation of others. Such observations for the moment seemed to give force and language to the very thoughts which he was always trying

to ignore and to silence. He was never easy till he had found some effectual answer which should satisfy the person making the observation, and reflect a satisfaction upon himself. But every time that this happened a tiny sting was left behind. And the cumulative poison gathered, and the slow conviction deepened, that some day or other he should become the victim of his own Past. But for all this he did not falter; he had never yet in his life faltered in any purpose deliberately entertained by him. His mind contained several deliberate purposes, and it was possible that at any moment in his circumspect advance he might pause and substitute one of these for another. But this would be a matter of considerate preference. It would not be because he abandoned any single intention owing to a change in his views concerning it; it would be because he found it impracticable to accomplish all his intentions in combination, and he therefore made his choice amongst them. At present he had three intentions, and he believed it to be possible to accomplish them all. The first was, as he said to himself, to secure the future comfort and respectability of a wayward girl against her own will, and at the cost of much present suffering. Colonel Seyton was as sure as he was, that utter misery was in store for her if she was left at the mercy of "that foreign scoundrel." Mr. Langley's second intention was to keep his own name clean and fair before the world. And his third was not to give any account of certain large sums of money which had already passed through his hands, and to secure that a certain additional large sum, which would be due on Lucia's coming of age, should be paid into his hands, and not into those of another.

Urged by these soft remorseless hands, the doom of poor Lucia was coming quick upon her. As she sat in her solitary room, weeping quietly to herself, praying, resolving, hoping, she little knew what was before her. She was unhappy enough, but she had no fears except for Marco's safety. Of herself she hardly thought at all. Somehow or other she should wear through the time of his absence, though it was more like dying than living. The nuns were kind to her, but kind in an unfamiliar, superficial way. There was something unapproachable about her sorrow. She was not one who went out to look for sympathy. She needed to have it brought to her, and poured into her heart. She did not find the comfort which she might have found in the chapel services and religious habits of the place. Her faith had been a mere vague sentiment about a God, whom she did assuredly believe to be a Father to His creatures, but whom she supposed to be misrepresented and defamed by a variety of systems devised by them, and not really revealed by Him. Something a little deeper, truer, and more Christian had come to her during her six months' residence with Jane Derwent, and was developing and growing out of her happiness with Marco; but the beginnings were still very crude and imperfect. On these subjects Marco and she had both much to learn. The party to which they belonged had been altogether in a state of separation and revolt from the peculiar forms of priestly influence and teaching around it. By many pastors of the Church to which, as I have said, they nominally belonged, they would assuredly have been rejected as heretics and in-

fidels. They, however, prayed in trouble, and gave thanks in joy with all their hearts, and so, let us hope, they would be gradually led on to better things. Lucia, therefore, complied with such suggestions as were made to her in the convent rather out of apathy than out of any submission of heart; was oftener absent than present in spirit at the various services; and put up her irregular petitions in solitude and at uncanonical hours. And these were often mere cries for help, scarcely articulate, struggling with much rebellion and murmuring of heart, which found in them a kind of utterance, and received through them a kind of soothing. The little picture which hung in her cell was a comfort to her, and was perhaps the only special help provided for her which she was then able to appreciate. She would sit or kneel, and look at it, with slowly-filling eyes, for silent lengths of time, when she had no other companion; and she would take into her poor heart as she looked some imperfect sense of the union of human sorrow and Divine love, which consoled though it did not heal her.

She was so sitting and so looking on the morning on which Mr. Langley and Miss Derwent arrived at the convent.

Mr. Langley was armed with a letter to the Superior which would, he expected, greatly facilitate his operations. It had not been difficult to him to procure this. Men whose "business" transactions are on so gigantic a scale as his are able to set a thousand springs in operation, the existence of which is hardly suspected by the multitude. So soon as Mr. Langley was informed by his agent in Ireland that Lucia was about to be received into a par-

ticular convent, he set himself to ascertain the exact circumstances not only of that convent, but of the diocese in which it was situated. His next step was to buy up a debt which might be very embarrassing to the authorities; and his next, to introduce himself to one of those authorities in person. He introduced himself as a father in great distress, deeply grateful for the shelter and kindness which had been afforded to his child. He spoke of the manner in which she had been betrayed, and of the real nature of the expedition for which Marco had deserted her. The name of Garibaldi was, of course, enough to horrify a representative of the Pope. Mr. Langley then made another gentle step in advance. He said that he was about to take his daughter back to his own protection, to relieve the charitable nuns from the expense of her maintenance, and to secure them from any future difficulties in which they might be involved if they were unwarily to entangle themselves with the proceedings of so disreputable a person as Rossetti. He himself was, he said, a man of liberal opinions, and he felt no kind of objection to any profession of faith which his daughter might hereafter feel inclined to adopt. But for the present she was not a Roman Catholic, though it had suited the purpose of the man who had led her astray to represent her as one. If his Excellency, or his Serenity (Mr. Langley was a little doubtful about his titles of honour), would entrust him with a letter to the Superior of the convent, directing that Lucia should be given up, he, on his part, was quite willing to pledge himself that any person whom his Excellency might appoint should have free access to

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her when she was under the shelter of her father's roof. And he should really rejoice if his Excellency could point out to him any way in which he could show his gratitude to those who had so befriended an imprudent and desolate girl. It was not impossible that some such way might be discoverable. He was concerned with a great many little affairs which might either embarrass or be advantageous to a great number of persons and bodies of persons. One little affair of that kind, which he rather thought might have some remote connection with the subject under discussion, he should be happy to place unreservedly in his Excellency's hands. But this was a matter for future consideration. *Et cetera.*

Mr. Langley got his letter; and feeling very little doubt about its effect, he determined to keep himself entirely in the background. He therefore, in the first instance, simply introduced himself and delivered his credentials. He then withdrew, leaving Miss Derwent to carry out the operation, and stating, as he went, that his servant was in attendance with orders to summon him at a moment's notice if any insuperable difficulty should present itself.

Miss Derwent sat down in the convent parlour, and looked at the lady to whom the letter was addressed while she read it twice through. She was an ordinary sort of woman, about fifty years old, with a good-natured, unintellectual sort of face, and a great aptitude for management. She had entertained an instinctive feeling from the first that some mischief would come of Lucia, whose story, appearance, and manners were altogether so exceptional, that she felt as uneasy in her presence as if it were

the presence of a ghost. But she had been fascinated, persuaded, and overruled by Marco, and if he had been at hand now to plead his own cause, neither Jane Derwent nor Mr. Langley would have had a chance against him. This was, however, a purely personal influence, and the two or three weeks which had passed since it was excited had sufficed to weaken it, and had created a considerable distaste for the charge which it had imposed upon her.

"This is a sad business," said she at last, looking up from her letter.

"Very sad," answered Jane; "but we will do everything in our power to soften it."

"I have no choice," said the lady.

"No; but if you had, I conclude that there is only one way in which you would wish to exert it. May I ask you to have the kindness to prepare Miss Langley for receiving me? I am afraid of startling her, though I think and hope that it will be a pleasure to her to see me."

A bell was rung, and one of the lieutenants of the Lady Superior was summoned. A good deal of whispering and consulting over the letter ensued, and then the second in command, who was a remarkably amiable, pleasant-looking woman, left the room.

She was absent about ten minutes, during which Jane tried hard to keep up a conversation with her taciturn companion. She wanted to hear as much as she could about Lucia. But the convent lady was uncommunicative, and Jane herself was so anxious that she could scarcely restrain herself from attempting an inroad upon the mysteries of the house in her impatience to see with

her own eyes what they were doing with Lucia, and how she was bearing it. The nun came back with a grave, uneasy face. "She is very much troubled and distressed," said she, "and she refuses to comply with the arrangements proposed to her."

"Pray let me go to her," said Jane, rising from her seat.

"She says that she will not see you, and that if you insist on going to her she will not speak to you. She seems both frightened and angry. I do not know what is to be done."

"Are you quite sure that she understands who it is that has come to fetch her?" asked Jane.

"Quite. I told her that Mr. Langley was not here, but that Mrs. Langley was waiting for her."

"Mrs. Langley! That accounts for it. I am Miss Derwent. I really *must* be allowed to go to her."

But the two nuns interposed. "Excuse me," said the Lady Superior; "I will explain the mistake myself, and bring her to you. Perhaps you could give me a card, so that there can be no further confusion."

Jane, much annoyed, but unable to carry her point, drew a card from her pocket, and wrote below the name, "I am here, and no one else." She then waited in indescribable anxiety, walking up and down the room, and not making any attempt to conceal her distress and impatience. She had a very little while to wait now. When the Lady Superior reached the door of Lucia's cell she found that the poor girl had been trying to secure it by tying down the latch. There was no mode of fastening

it on the inside. The lady knocked, and asked for admittance in a tone of authority, saying that she should be sorry to be compelled to break the door open, though of course it would be easy to do so. Only sobs answered her. She persevered, and when she named Miss Derwent there was a sudden pause in the sound of weeping within the room, as if the occupant were making an effort to listen. She then thrust the card under the door, and in a minute Lucia came out agitated and eager, making scarcely intelligible excuses for her contumacy. Hurrying past the Lady Superior, she ran unannounced into the convent parlour, and threw herself into Jane Derwent's arms.

XXX.—NO REFUGE.

The nuns were greatly relieved when they saw Lucia clinging to her friend, and heard her say in broken accents, what a comfort it was to her to see the kind face again. They thought that their own difficulties were over now, and they immediately made private arrangements for packing up the small stock of worldly goods which belonged to their unwelcome inmate, so that there might be no unnecessary delay in her departure. There were, however, some obstacles to be got over still.

"*You* won't deceive me—I am safe with *you!*" said Lucia. "Tell me, cannot I stay here?—can't you stay with me? Why am I to be sent away?"

"We are very sorry," replied the Lady Superior, forestalling Miss Derwent's answer; "we do not wish to show you the slightest unkindness or inhospitality, but we

have received directions which render it quite impossible for us to give you a home any longer; and as your own friends have come forward, there can be no reason why you should not return at once to your own home."

"Don't say '*friends*' and '*home!*'" cried Lucia; "I have neither!—no friend anywhere within reach, except *you!*" keeping fast hold upon Jane Derwent's hand.

"You see," said Jane, "that you cannot remain here. Is it not better to go at once?"

Lucia looked wistfully at the faces of her companions in turn. "If I only knew where to write to him now," sighed she. "But it may be weeks before he receives my letter! And he left me here!"

"If you speak of Signor Rossetti," said the Lady Superior, "I think it only right to mention that he left you here under false pretences. If we had been aware—"

Lucia flushed all over. "Let us go at once," said she, drawing Jane Derwent away. She made a proud curtsey to her hostess, and walked straight out of the room. Jane felt guilty in letting her obey her impulses so ignorantly. Though she knew that she was only acting for Lucia's good, it seemed like treachery. She followed her, however, and in the passage which led to the sleeping-cells they encountered one of the servants of the house carrying out Lucia's portmanteau packed and strapped. Lucia was a good deal moved at the sight.

"See how they want to get rid of me," cried she. "Ah! how helpless I am! What cold hearts! If you had not come for me, where could I have gone? I have *no* money and no friends. Where are you going to take *me?*"

Jane did not at once answer this question, and Lucia went on. "We must go first to the post-office and arrange very carefully so that I may get my letters, and then —are we going to your own home? How *good* you are to me!" (pressing her hand). "But tell me, how did you find me out? What made you follow me here? Did you know that they were going to turn me out of doors?"

"Mr. Langley's inquiries—" began Jane.

Lucia flung herself away from her with a sharp cry. "Ah! you are not going to give me back to *him!*" exclaimed she; "you would not—you *could* not—no, I am *sure* you could not! You are true—you are good—you would never be false to me! Speak to me—tell me—say, only just say, that you would never do such a thing as that by me, when I am trusting you with all my heart!"

"Trust me still!" said Jane, warmly. "I will stay by you, and no harm shall be done to you. But you *must* have shelter and protection, and, believe me, this is the only way. You are to go with me to Parc Rhaiader, and there we are to stay quietly together till—till—"

"Till Marco comes home. As well there as anywhere else if I were only safe from Mr. Langley."

"Dear Lucia, he only wishes your good. What would become of you, where could you go, if he were not willing to receive you back? He will not coerce you in any way; he does not even ask to see you; he leaves you to me, and I promise never to forsake you."

"Ah! don't trust him! don't trust him!" cried Lucia, wringing her hands.

"But the law gives him power to take you for the present, and nothing can prevent it: understand that, pray. You have really no choice—you will be obliged to come—you *know* I would not tell you a falsehood."

"Do you mean that he can take me away by force?" asked Lucia, very pale, and holding the banisters with both hands as if she would cling there and die, rather than go.

"Yes, indeed I do mean it; but there is no chance that such a thing will really happen. You will come quietly. Listen—I give you my word of honour that I will stay with you. If you like I will get Mr. Langley to promise that you shall not see him at all—that he will not come into your presence. I think I could induce him to promise that you shall go in the first instance with me to my house, and not be under his roof at all till we go down to Parc Rhaiader together."

"Get those promises for me," said Lucia, faintly. She sat down upon a stair, as if hardly able to stand, and still kept a tight hold upon the banisters. Jane wrote a few words upon a leaf torn out of her pocket-book, folded and directed them, and called to the woman who had carried Lucia's portmanteau downstairs to desire that the paper might be given to Mr. Langley's servant, with a request for an answer from his master.

Lucia gave another cry. "Is he so near then?" asked she, shuddering.

She sat still and did not speak, but trembled and murmured to herself during the time which passed before the return of the servant. Jane sat down by her, and tried to

soothe and console her. She said everything that she could think of to explain and soften her position. She did not allude to Marco's desertion, nor to any doubts as to the validity of the marriage. This was a question of fact, and must be proved sooner or later. She thought that the one thing needful now was to induce the poor girl to consent to place herself in safe and respectable keeping, where she might be tenderly cared for whenever the great blow should fall. Reason and life seemed both to be in danger. Jane hardly knew whether to wish that they might be preserved. For in spite of all that might be said, and said unanswerably, of sorrows that are outlived, and strokes from which the sufferer recovers—of the wild griefs of youth which middle-age remembers with a smile—of passions that wear themselves out, and follies which must needs undergo repression; in spite of all this, which Jane would neither gainsay nor disbelieve, she could not look at the shivering form beside her without saying to herself, "This is a mortal wound; there is no hope here."

The servant came back, and Jane read aloud the paper which he brought, which was written and signed by Mr. Langley. It contained these words—"I promise not to see or speak to her during the journey. I agree that she shall go first to Mr. Derwent's house, and afterwards with you to Parc Rhaiader; and I promise not to visit her in either place.—EVERARD LANGLEY."

Having read this, Jane put her arm round Lucia and helped her to rise. She stood up, still trembling, "Ah, what am I to do? what am I to do?" cried she, throwing her hands up wildly, "He would break his promise

in a moment if he wished it." Then she caught the banisters again, as if she feared that in that one unguarded moment she might be seized and dragged away. She looked downstairs and saw people gathering in the hall, and she drew back a step or two as if about to fly.

"You *must* come with me," said Jane, persuasively. "They are getting impatient for you to go."

"Nobody wants to have me," murmured Lucia, dropping her hands by her sides. "No help—no help! Why am I alive in the world?" Then, suddenly turning and putting her arm about Jane's neck, she said, with a softened voice and a piteous, appealing smile, "See, I give myself up to you! I am going to trust you! Oh, be true to me!"

She went downstairs now, but still with the greatest apparent reluctance, moaning and wringing her hands, and stopping more than once, as if she had changed her purpose and would go no further. However, she did go down and out at the house door, and—at last—into the carriage which was waiting. As she placed her foot on the step she paused, and, grasping Jane's arm, said, "Remember, we are to go first to the post-office!" and not till this had been positively promised would she get into the carriage. Some lurking misgivings as to the part which Mr. Langley was really acting, perhaps lingered in Jane Derwent's mind. At any rate she resolved that she would not be instrumental in withholding Marco's letters from Lucia. "If he has really deserted her"—thus she reasoned—"he will either not write at all, or there will be a change of tone which will break the bitter news to

her better than we can. And if he has *not*, he ought to be allowed to speak for himself." So she wrote clear and full instructions at the post-office—"Any letters addressed to Mrs. Bennett, Convent of ——, Green Street, G——, to be forwarded to the care of W. Derwent, Esq."—with her own address in full appended. And on this point only did Mr. Langley's scheme fail. His first step, after it was reported to him that the two ladies had left the convent, was to go there and arrange that all Lucia's letters should be forwarded to him. He did not suspect that he had been forestalled, and here chance for once was against him, for no person at the convent had heard the order given to drive to the post-office.

Jane was not quite easy about her pledge to receive Lucia into her own house. It had been in a manner forced upon her, and she was not quite sure how her father would take it. She had great confidence, however, in his thorough kindness of heart, which seldom failed to carry the day against his little perversities of temper when anything was really to be done. She wrote him a long, explanatory, and entreating letter, to which she received the following answer—directed, according to her request, to Chester, which was their last halting-place on their way to London. They were obliged to travel slowly, for Lucia was ill, and they waited two days in Dublin in order to obtain medical advice for her. Mr. Langley preceded them everywhere, and, strictly observing his promise, never intruded himself into Lucia's presence. This was Mr. Derwent's letter:—

"My dear Jane,

"Emma has been very busy getting all the rooms ready, and we are quite prepared to receive you. I have given up *my* room to the cabman, for I suppose you intend to bring the whole party. I shall be very glad when it is all over. But I make no objection, except to receiving the nuns. I am quite sure that I could not have them in the house without really getting back into the middle ages, in spite of myself. The cabman, for whom you know I had always a fancy, gives me a hold on actual life, which is wholesome. I hope you will make haste; and pray don't forget that we have only a limited number of spare rooms.

"Your affectionate father,

"W. Derwent."

XXXI.—HOW TO MAKE EVIDENCE.

Waiting for letters! That one sentence describes Lucia's life now. But as the torturing days slowly unwind themselves, another sentence is inscribed upon them—Waiting in vain! It is a weary life to all; to her it was almost intolerable. Jane Derwent tried to furnish her with occupations, but it was a hopeless task. The languid impatience in her face defied all efforts either to rouse or to soothe it. When she looked up, which was seldom, the eyelids rose heavily and consciously, as if she had to determine to lift them before she could do it, and the eyes which met yours ached so visibly that you involuntarily closed your own. She followed eagerly the course *of the* Sicilian campaign as the autumn advanced; she

noted triumph after triumph proclaiming itself through the eloquent astonishment of the newspapers, and her face flushed and brightened as she read, and then fell again, and resumed its piteous, wistful, unresting look. She did not say a word on these subjects even to Jane, and the Derwents believed and told Mr. Langley that she was gradually opening her eyes to the fact that she was abandoned, and that it was as well not to try to accelerate the conviction. Various reasons induced Mr. Langley to leave her in London instead of sending her down to Parc Rhaiader; and Mr. Derwent, having once admitted her, made no further objection. He became interested in her, and sometimes joined in Jane's attempts to divert or engage her thoughts. Emma, who began by being afraid of her, gradually settled down into a perfect pity which cast out fear; watched her, tenderly and quietly, from morning till night, and if one wavering smile flitted across her lips, looked upon that day as a day of victory.

It was the habit of the family to give the drawing-room up to Lucia during the morning hours. Mr. Derwent wrote in his own room. Emma was busy with housekeeping and needlework in unseen regions, from which she never emerged till luncheon. Jane generally went out to attend pupils, but joined Lucia in her intervals of leisure, and tried, as we have said, to devise employments for her, though with little success. One day when Lucia was sitting alone as usual, poring over the map of Sicily, and wondering for the thousandth time whether the heart she loved best on earth had ceased to beat amid the glories of Calatafimi, but never for one moment

asking herself the question whether it had ceased to think of her, she was told that a gentleman wished to speak with her. She started up in wild expectation, but the person who entered was a stranger, and conspicuously an Englishman. He was too glaringly clerical in his dress and demeanour to have been mistaken for anything in the world but a clergyman of the Church of England, if you had met him on the steppes of the Caucasus. The stainless precision of attire, the slight formality of manner, the deliberate fluency of speech resulting from that sacred security from interruption peculiar to the clergy—these were all characteristics. But there was also that look of genuine and habitual sympathy, of steady purity, of constant self-control, that breath of an air a little higher and a little clearer than the common atmosphere of worldly business, which are not less characteristic of the class, and which atone for many shortcomings, and give dignity even to foibles. After a moment's hesitation, Lucia recognized him as the usual preacher at the church which she attended every Sunday with the Derwents; he was rector of the parish in which they lived. Mr. Langley had specially urged upon the Derwents his wish that Lucia should regularly go to church with them; and it was a wish too entirely in accordance with their own to be neglected. She did not attempt the slightest opposition; the habit was a comfort to her; and if she sometimes wandered away into a reverie during the sermon, her fault in this was perhaps shared by some of the better-instructed listeners, none of whom could well be *more zealous* in the prayers than poor Lucia.

Mr. Feversham now sat down by her and easily introduced himself. "You are one of my flock," said he kindly, "and I know that you have been in a good deal of trouble, and I want to make acquaintance with you. I think I may, perhaps, be able to help you a little with books and subjects of thought, for you know it is my particular business to comfort and help people who are in sorrow." It is an odd but common fact, that reserved natures find it easier to open themselves to total strangers who approach them in the right way, than to members of the household in which they live, however affectionate and judicious these may be. This fact almost always gives pain, and very often creates jealousy. But it seems to be entirely a part of human nature; it is, perhaps, the chief human basis of the confessional system; it is certainly not intended as a wrong to affection, and it ought not to be felt as such. There are two ways of accounting for it, of which those who feel themselves wronged by it ought not to lose sight. One is, that the person who receives such confessions is, so to speak, new to the whole matter: he simply listens and learns; he is not comparing the things now revealed with former impressions of his own, perhaps quite inconsistent with them; the speaker has not to dread those looks of surprise, incredulity, or distress, which, however slight and transient, are felt as shocks, and do of necessity shut up a heart which has any natural difficulty in opening. The other is, that the relation between speaker and hearer is, at any rate for a time, comprised within the limits of the confession; and the sensitive man who has told his weaknesses, his inward aspirations, his unguessed

sufferings, has not to feel that the eye of the friend who knows his secret is on him from morning till night, comparing what it sees with what it now expects to see, and judging the differences, whether real or apparent.

After the first shyness was broken through, Lucia did find herself helped and comforted by Mr. Feversham's visits, and learned to look for and to welcome them. He brought books; he beguiled her into conversation; he never seemed to wonder either at her ignorance or her errors, but he quietly recognized both, and helped her to get rid of them. It did not occur to her that there was anything controversial in his mode of approaching religious subjects with her. True, in the beginning of their intercourse, he sometimes spoke to her of certain Romish corruptions, which she and Marco had long ago agreed to regard as corruptions; and she unhesitatingly expressed her opinion. There were some Church of England doctrines which she, very dimly and vaguely appreciating them, was inclined to look upon in the same light; for, as we have said before, her creed was only a sentiment. Mr. Feversham did not argue—he explained and he taught; and Lucia was willing to learn, and quite felt it to be a duty to rouse herself to attend to his lessons when no other subject could have drawn her for a moment from brooding over her own thoughts. When this intercourse had continued for some time, Mr. Feversham called upon Mr. Langley by appointment.

"I think you may be quite easy about your daughter, my dear sir," said he; "she has not been tampered with. My task with her has been very interesting and pleasant,

and I assure you I should not hesitate now to present her for Confirmation."

"You give me great comfort," said Mr. Langley. "I suppose you found her sadly ignorant."

"Why, yes," answered the other, with a slight, complacent smile; "her mind was very nearly a *tabula rasa,* but I don't think you will find it so now."

"I have much to thank you for. You say a '*tabula rasa,*'—then I suppose I may conclude that she was not familiar with, nor attached to, any of those special doctrines which we call Popish."

"Quite the contrary," replied Mr. Feversham; "I think that I have taught her a good deal, but I can't flatter myself that I have converted her."

"Would you have any objection to making that statement in writing?" asked Mr. Langley. "It would be an immense satisfaction to my wife, who is hardly equal to discussing the subject in person with you; and it would be a vindication of those who are accused of having taken advantage of a time of distress in order to instil false doctrine into her mind."

"I will write at once, if you please, though with a mild protest against your theory of religious zeal. I should have seen nothing to blame in the nuns if they *had* tried to convert her, though I should have been very sorry if they had succeeded."

Mr. Feversham sat down at the writing-table as he spoke, and in a minute handed the following note to Mr. Langley:—

"My dear Sir,

"I have had constant communication with Miss Langley on religious subjects during several weeks, and I am perfectly able and willing to certify that she has at no time been instructed in the peculiar doctrines of the Roman Catholic faith, and that she has no predilection for them.

"Very sincerely yours,

"James Feversham."

A little further conversation ensued between the two gentlemen. Mr. Feversham was very much in the dark about Lucia's history, and Mr. Langley now consented to throw a little light upon it, of the degree and the colour which appeared to him desirable. The good clergyman went away with his heart rather warmer towards the daughter than towards the father, and with a strong inclination to reproach himself on this account. But there is no doubt that a treacherous character, however skilfully masked, has a natural repulsion for perfect honesty of soul. The true man may be duped, but he is always a little disgusted during the process.

Mr. Langley's next step was to communicate with the Roman Catholic dignitary who had more than once pressed for access to Lucia, in fulfilment of a promise which will be remembered, but who had always been put off by assurances that she was not well enough to receive him.

"My daughter has now recovered her health," said Mr. Langley, "and I am extremely anxious that you should see her. Her state of feeling on religious subjects

gives me great pain, and I shall be very thankful indeed if you can make her a devout Roman Catholic. Anything is better than indifference or scepticism. I will give you a letter to her, urging her to grant you a patient hearing, and I shall feel exceedingly obliged if you will write to me after your first interview, and tell me quite honestly and plainly in what state of mind you find her. I should also like to know whether you do not think that some blame attaches to the Superior of the Convent in which she resided, for the ignorance of the elements of Christian doctrine in which she has been suffered to remain."

Armed with this "urgent letter," the effect of which Mr. Langley had very exactly calculated, the priest presented himself before Lucia. She read his credential, and was instantly in an attitude of hostility. She did not admit a moment's doubt that he was an emissary of Mr. Langley, and that he came for a bad purpose.

"I am not a Roman Catholic," said she, with her usual impetuosity, "and I do not wish to be made one."

The priest was a sensible man and a gentleman. He spoke to her kindly and courteously. He did not instantly abandon his attempt, but beyond a certain point he could not urge it. The few questions which he asked her were answered abruptly and unsatisfactorily, or else received in total silence. The view which she took of him from the moment in which he put Mr. Langley's letter into her hand prevented her from even trying to be polite to him. Jane Derwent, who was present, and who was pained by her manner, more than once interposed. The priest withdrew at last, baffled, distressed, and a little indignant;

and as soon as he reached home he dispatched the following letter to Mr. Langley, in compliance with that gentleman's request:—

My dear Sir,

"I fear that your daughter has, at present, an invincible prejudice against the Catholic faith. She assured me that she was not a member of the Church, and that she was not willing to be instructed in its doctrines. She appeared to me to be quite ignorant of the first principles of belief. I do not think that any blame can be fairly attached to the Lady Superior for leaving her in a state of ignorance. It is quite clear that the poor girl's mind has been saturated with the poison of modern infidelity, and that for the present she opposes herself resolutely to a better teaching. The unhappy man who led her astray is doubtless chargeable with this as with other guilt. It is very grievous to me to see a young mind thus injured; but there is comfort in remembering that it is so young a mind, and that it has not rejected Truth, because Truth has not yet been presented to it. If you can be induced to trust this poor child to me, I will very thankfully accept the charge."

Certain sentences, expressive of genuine feeling and hope, a little too serious for record in these pages, here followed. Mr. Langley was quite satisfied with his two documents. Lucia's marriage was of course void if she was not a Roman Catholic, and the evidence on that point seemed now abundant and complete. He was moving slowly but

surely towards his end. The absence of letters from Marco was a great satisfaction to him. To be sure, the manner in which Marco was engaged was not particularly favourable to correspondence, and the state of the country in which he was travelling rendered postal arrangement a little uncertain. It is said that the younger son of his great chief—a boy at school—excused himself during this very Sicilian campaign for not knowing exactly where his father was at a given time, by saying, quietly, "Papa is very busy just now, and has not had time to write." And the same excuse might assuredly be made for Marco. But the result—so Mr. Langley hoped, and so the Derwents believed—was that Lucia's faith in him was slowly giving way; and the time approached at which it might be confidently expected that one sharp blow would shiver to pieces an edifice the foundations of which had been so thoroughly undermined. In short, Mr. Langley felt convinced that the end was now drawing very near.

And so it was.

XXXII.—THE END APPROACHING.

Mr. Langley was a light sleeper and an early riser. He was not more indulgent to himself than to others, and he had no soft tendencies to reverie, no pleasant dalliances with departing slumber to chain him to his pillow when once his eyes were open. He generally went to bed with some definite purpose in his mind which awoke with him, and stung and harassed him till it was accomplished. So it happened that he rose very early one warm morning in

August, and walked down to Fareham Street before breakfast, intending to see Jane Derwent alone, while the rest of the family were still at their toilettes. He wanted to tell her that he thought the time was now come for breaking to Lucia the fact that she was not really a wife. The toils were close around her; escape was impossible. She had herself furnished evidence, unconsciously but unanswerably, of the invalidity of her marriage. Nothing but her submission was now wanted, and he did not think that this could long be withheld. If he had seen her lately he might perhaps have doubted, for he was a keener interpreter of soul-secrets than any of the Derwents. Yet even he would perhaps have been deceived, for if there was any one thing on earth which seemed to him quite impossible, it was unconquerable and unquestioning faith in a fellow-creature.

If he had seen her lately he might have doubted on another point, a failure on which would baffle him as effectually as any resistance of hers: he might have doubted whether his victory would be achieved over a living, reasoning woman. From two sides poor Lucia's doom was approaching; the question was, not whether either foe would reach and grasp her, but which would outstrip the other. Her wasting form, her burning eyes, her trembling hands—her short, quick breath, which pained the watchful ear, and seemed to labour till from time to time it relieved itself by a long, low, dragging sigh, and then panted again—all these were signs which it was hardly possible to mistake. The Derwents were a family of strong health and small anxiety, but even they were beginning to be un-

easy, and had already taken a medical opinion. But it was pronounced that there was no disease, only a little want of strength, and she was ordered air, and exercise, and nourishing diet. And these were provided, but still the evil grew. Do not be sorry for her. If freedom can come in no other way, let it come thus! Thus at least it is sure.

A sudden heavy shower surprised Mr. Langley on his early walk. The morning was so brilliant that it had not occurred to him to take precautions against rain, and he had neither cloak nor umbrella. He was very wet when he arrived at Mr. Derwent's door. He was, as has been said, habitually anxious and timid about his health, and the circumstance annoyed him extremely. He determined to go at once into the kitchen, and to get his clothes thoroughly dry before he inquired for Jane.

He was, however, unexpectedly detained. Just as he laid his hand upon the knocker, a quick, measured tread behind him attracted his attention, and as he turned his head he saw the postman. So Mr. Langley took the letters from the man's hand, and involuntarily glanced at them before he knocked at the door. His eye was instantly caught by a large packet addressed to Miss Derwent, and bearing the G—— post-mark. He suspected mischief at once, and having had previous reason to distrust Jane's judgment, he resolved to forestall any possible error now. Standing close against the door so that no person could see him from any window of the house, he broke the seal of the packet and examined its contents. It contained four foreign letters, directed to Mrs. Bennett, at the G——

Convent, bearing different post-marks, and various records of delay and mis-sending on their covers. The last was of recent date. He had them still in his hands when the door was suddenly opened by poor Lucia herself, and he stood face to face with her for the first time for many weeks. She had been as usual watching for the postman's knock, and when she heard it at the next door, and listened in vain for it at her own, she ran down in feverish impatience to ascertain the reason.

Mr. Langley did not lose his presence of mind for a moment. Lucia showed much less self-command. She started, trembled, and changed colour. Without hesitation Mr. Langley put the other letters into her passive hand, and saying, in a tone of assumed indifference, "Ah, Maude! how you surprised me—I thought it was the maid. I am so wet that I must go to the kitchen to dry myself," passed on with his prize, and left her to examine the comparatively valueless collection which he had given into her keeping.

He breathed hard when he got into the kitchen, like a man who has escaped a great danger. There was only one maid in the room, and she, profuse in abashed civilities, having welcomed him and made way for him to the fire, ran off to fetch a pair of Mr. Derwent's slippers, that he might get rid without delay of his own wet boots.

As soon as Mr. Langley found himself alone, he hastily ascertained that the four letters were safe, and was then about to thrust them into his pocket, when his eye was caught by a little slip of paper, torn from one of them in opening the packet, and adhering to the outer envelope.

Part of a sentence was plainly legible upon it, and the words were these—"*Our victory over Mr. Langley is complete.*" He was startled, and with a rapid rush of thought, such as is sometimes supposed to bring the history of a life before a drowning man in a moment of time, he reviewed the circumstances of his position. The proof against Lucia's marriage was satisfactory; no danger could come from that quarter. Was it her identity which Marco hoped to disprove? But how could he do it? Lilia was dead. Mr. Langley was able to show that Lucia, or Maude, had, during childhood, known nothing of her own parentage, and had believed herself to be, as he asserted her to be, his daughter, up to the time at which Marco imposed his own story upon her. Was it likely that Marco's evidence would be accepted in a case in which his own personal interests were so deeply involved? The whole fortune which, if Lilia had lived, would have been divided between the two sisters, was now Lucia's, and would, of course, be Marco's if he could succeed in proving that Lucia was the elder sister. Questions of identity are proverbially difficult, but in this particular case it was not only word against word—though Mr. Langley believed that in any English court his word would, under the circumstances, outweigh Marco's. He was certain that Lucia would break down under any examination skilfully directed to the point of proving the influence which Marco had exercised over her mind. And he had provided himself with further evidence in the shape of an old woman who had nursed the two children, and who had afterwards been employed by him to ascertain the

place of their retreat at Montevideo, and to convey some of those letters and messages which had so deeply stirred the wrath of Madame Rossetti. She would swear anything that he told her to swear. If it came to a trial, the course of the evidence would determine the precise substance of the statement which he would require her to attest upon oath. He was therefore safe. What could this "*complete victory*" be? Curiosity fairly mastered prudence, and Mr. Langley opened the letter.

"My dear sir, I am afraid you are very wet," said a voice close at his elbow. It was Mr. Derwent, slippers in hand, coming to do the honours of his kitchen to his unexpected guest. This time Mr. Langley's presence of mind entirely forsook him for a moment, and with a start and a flush, hardly knowing what he did, he dropped the whole packet of letters into the fire.

"Ah!" cried Mr. Derwent, "can't we save them?" But the other checked him as he was taking the tongs in order to extricate the papers from the flames, and said, having now quite recovered his composure, "No, no! it wasn't an accident. I had finished reading my letters, and was glad to burn them. I get such an accumulation." It was with difficulty—with conspicuous effort—with often-recurring absence of mind—that Mr. Langley took part in all the little civilities which ensued about his walk, his wetting, and his breakfast. He was indescribably provoked with himself. Why had he thrown the packet into the fire? It would have been just as easy to put it into his pocket. He could not forgive himself. When he was interrupted he had barely read the first sentence of

the letter, which did not interest him, as it consisted only of words of the tenderest affection. He did not regret having burned *them*. Yet it was like a murder to have done so. There they were, those warm, sweet messages from the heart—silent, fruitless, dead before his eyes—while the heart which they should have reached and blessed was fainting for want of them! It was as though he had struck away a cup of wine from the lips of the dying. But he never thought of that. Lucia might sob and moan upstairs, clasping her cold hands upon her burning face, as she said over and over again to herself, "No news! no news! I am never to hear of him more! Dead, without a word! Lost for ever!" That was nothing to him. But it was much to him that he had, by his own want of self-control, destroyed the key to that mysterious sentence. It haunted, it harassed, it tortured him. He was obliged to make a great effort, and to put to silence by one strong decree of his will all those conjectures and suggestions which could only torment him uselessly, and which could have no practical result. But the secret issuing of strong decrees of one's will is not favourable to general pleasantness in society, and the Derwents had never liked him so little as during that breakfast. He was cold, cynical, unreal. As Jane said afterwards, "He seemed to look at you without seeing you, and to answer you without having heard what you said. I can't think what was the matter with him."

"For my part," said her father, "I prefer his manner on this occasion to his usual manner, when he seems to me to see you without looking at you. I like a man to

be a little absent in society. It always puts me at my ease."

"Does it?" said Emma, surprised. "It always makes me shy."

"That is because your shyness proceeds from a desire to obtain attention, not from a desire to escape it," answered Mr. Derwent. "Now I am really modest. If a man has all his wits about him, I very seldom consider myself a match for him; but if he is a little absent, he becomes my helpless prey. But, Jane, what makes *you* so absent? Did Mr. Langley communicate anything very important to you in his private interview after breakfast?"

"No," said Jane, with a sigh. "He only said what we have all been thinking, that it is useless to leave his daughter any longer in the dark about her real position."

"He ought to tell her himself," said Mr. Derwent, sharply.

"It is really a kind feeling which withholds him from doing so. The blow would be more painful to her, coming from him; and she is so persuaded that he is Marco's enemy, that she would hardly believe him. No, I feel that it must be done, and, I am sorry to say, I feel also that I must do it."

Chance favoured the execution of Jane's purpose that very evening. She and Lucia went together to walk in the park. They had been in the habit of taking evening walks since the doctor ordered exercise for Lucia. They were strolling quietly along, conversing languidly at intervals, when they suddenly met Colonel Seyton, walking between his wife and a very pretty girl, whose strong like-

ness to Mrs. Seyton announced her for a younger sister. Little May, who was with them, ran joyfully up to her friend Maude, who, brightening into such a smile as had not been seen on her face for a long time, welcomed her with open arms. Mrs. Seyton was stepping forward also, but her husband kept her arm tightly drawn through his own, and walked quickly past, saying, with a slight bow, "How do you do, Miss Derwent? Ah! how do you do?" (to Lucia). "Did not know you were in town. Come, May, we shall be late."

The child had to run in order to overtake him.

"Oh, Frederick!" cried his wife, "how unkind! I did so want to speak to her."

"My love, I am very sorry, but I had no choice. It is an awkward story—a very awkward story. We know hardly anything about it, really; but I must say what we do know is quite enough to make me wish to drop the acquaintance for you and not to make it for Ellen. I could not have answered it to your mother if I had allowed Ellen to be introduced to her."

"How handsome she is!" said Ellen, in rather an awe-struck voice, knowing that there was some mystery about her into which it was better not to inquire.

"How ill she looks!" said kind May Seyton, with tears in her eyes.

"Mamma, dear, when may I go and see her?" asked Little May. "May I go to-morrow morning? Will you take me?"

"Papa says I mustn't," answered the wise mamma, in that *submissive victim*-tone which is natural to spoilt chil-

dren on the few and rare occasions on which they are opposed by their spoilers. Colonel Seyton felt that he was in disgrace, and devoted the whole evening to making his peace, but for once he kept to his determination.

Lucia was struck with the coldness and hurry of her friends. "They did not even stop to say they would call, or to tell us their address!" cried she. "Was it not very strange?"

"I think," said Jane, "they seemed to wish to have nothing to do with us."

"But why should that be? They seemed to be really fond of us."

"Don't you think yourself that it looked like an intentional avoidance?"

"But you know it *could* not be intentional," said poor Lucia.

Jane was silent.

During the walk, and after returning home, Lucia more than once reverted to the subject, and Jane encountered her in the same manner. At last came the natural inevitable question—"But do you know any reason why they should not wish to be friendly with us?" And then Jane told her.

Jane Derwent was in some respects rather a hard woman. Moral cowardice was perhaps the sin which of all others she thought the most mischievous, and which she was the most desirous to escape. If she had made up her mind that a thing must be done sooner or later, she wished to do it at once and get it over. And she was *quite in the* habit of making up her mind that disagreeable

things must be done. But she was really kind-hearted and her sympathy with Lucia was deep and strong. She did not say a word more than she thought she was obliged to say, and she said it as gently as possible.

It was very difficult to make Lucia understand. She was puzzled, surprised, indignant; but at first it did not seem to make her unhappy. She scarcely perceived what was meant by the cloud that was upon her. In fact, the cloud without was so much less than the darkness within, that it hardly affected her. Gradually, however, the real import of what was said became clear to her, and she received this new wound and covered it like the others. It did not, however, in the slightest degree produce the effect which had been anticipated. She showed not one single symptom of submission. She could not comprehend how any sort of submission should be proposed to her. If the law did not call her a wife, this was merely the result of a mistake. But she could not say that the mistake should be set right when Marco returned, for in her heart she believed that he was dead, and this was the real agony. She was a widow for the rest of her life; she hoped it was but for a little while; what did it matter to her what others thought of her? Nevertheless, the wound did bleed inwardly, for pride and modesty lie very deep in a true woman's nature, and when they are touched she suffers whether she owns it or not.

"If Mrs. Feversham calls," said Lucia—the clergyman had talked of bringing his wife—"remember that I do not wish to see her."

"Why not?" asked Jane; "I thought you wished—"

Lucia stood up trembling in limbs and voice. "I want you all to understand," said she, "that I am not in the least ashamed of anything that Marco has done, but if there are any people in the world who do not wish to know me because I belong to Marco, I do not wish to know them." And then she burst into tears.

It was the first time that she had mentioned his name for several weeks, and from the way in which she mentioned it the Derwents understood how entirely they had been mistaken in supposing that her faith in him had failed; or, as they would have expressed it, that she was beginning to open her eyes. There was something infectious in her absolute confidence, and when she left the room, father and daughters all felt for the moment as if they had been wronging him.

"Well," said Mr. Derwent, as he looked at his newspaper, "these fellows have been doing their work pretty thoroughly in Sicily and Naples, and if Rossetti is really half what that poor girl thinks him, he will come back to speak for himself."

"He may be killed!" said Emma.

"He may come back too late!" said Jane.

XXXIII.—THE END.

It was exactly three weeks since the memorable morning on which Mr. Langley burned the letters. Two or three days after that event he received a note from Jane which gave a very sad description of Lucia's state, both in body and mind. He replied by desiring that she might have medical attendance, and that everything possible

should be done to soothe and to cheer her. "Depend upon it," wrote he, "the worst is now over. She knows the truth. A little time must be allowed her to familiarize herself with it. And then she will begin to recover. And her heart will naturally warm towards those who are willing to receive and to love her without any reference to the unhappy position in which her own rashness has placed her. It is well that she should know that there are such persons. My partner, Mr. Dennis, and his sister, two thoroughly kind people, of refinement and education, are well acquainted with Maude's history, and feel for her nothing but sympathy and compassion. They are anxious to be allowed to take her with them on a little tour which they propose making in Germany this autumn. I think the change of scene and of companionship likely to be most beneficial to her. I enclose a letter for her from Miss Dennis, which speaks for itself, and which will, I think, touch and please her. I am very sanguine about this little scheme. And I feel confident that the worst is over for my poor girl, and that from this time forward she will begin to rally."

The theory was a very good one, but the facts were not exactly in accordance with it, and it was one of those cases in which it was undoubtedly so much the worse for the facts.

Since this letter, Mr. Langley had had no communication with the Derwents. He had been obliged to leave London for a few days on business. The firm was not quite in a satisfactory state. Two or three untoward events had lately occurred, and Mr. Langley was by no means easy in his mind. For the first time it occurred to

him that there was a possibility of his not tiding over the time which must pass before Lucia's coming of age would enable him to touch the principal of her fortune. Sleepless nights, hard calculations, rapid journeys, and anxious thoughts had tried him a good deal; and more than once a certain sharp pain in the chest, the very existence of which he would fain have ignored, startled him, drawing the colour out of his lips and the light out of his eyes, and warning him that the unpleasant task of asking a doctor "what it meant," could not be very much longer deferred. He and Mr. Dennis came at last to a tolerably satisfactory agreement about their money difficulties. They had the power, as trustees, of taking a good many large sums of money belonging to other people which they had no right to take, and they determined to take them. It was the old story. It was all to be replaced when Lucia came of age. No fraud was intended, and they were not in the least ashamed of what they had done, though they would not have it known for the world.

Affairs were in this state when Mr. Langley once more walked down to Fareham Street, to see for himself how Lucia was, and to forward this scheme of a tour with the Dennises, from which he hoped so much. He had resolved to consider that the ice was broken between himself and Lucia by their chance encounter in the doorway on the morning on which he burned the letters. He would no longer allow her to seclude herself during his visits; he would insist upon seeing her; and, following out the theory about her which he had projected in his own mind, he felt little doubt that he should find her in a satisfactory *state of progress.*

He had no occasion to insist, for when he entered the drawing-room—having been delayed two or three minutes in the hall by the servant, who told him that she was ordered to admit no visitors till she had ascertained that the ladies were disengaged—he found Lucia there.

She was sitting with her back to the window, so that in the dusky light of a London afternoon he could not tell much about the expression of her face. She did not rise or take any notice of him when he entered, but this was too much in accordance with her usual ways to surprise or disturb him. He looked at her curiously and a little anxiously. She was certainly altered; these weeks had done their work upon her. She was paler and thinner; she looked altogether shrunken. Her head was bent over some work which lay in her lap, and she did not lift it. He fancied that the rise and fall of her chest was a little too quick to be quite natural; but she was probably suppressing agitation, and he would give her time to recover herself. Mr. Derwent and Jane were in the room, and he addressed himself to them. They received him with a little restraint and embarrassment of manner; he felt that they were uneasy about their wayward inmate—doubtful how she would behave—afraid of his resenting her behaviour. This was quite what might be expected, and his first thought was to set them at their ease.

"I have been out of town," said he, "or you would have seen me here before. Your note made me a little anxious about Maude," glancing composedly at the quiet figure in the window; "but I am glad to see her looking better than I expected. A little change of air and scene will, *I expect, work* wonders."

To his surprise neither Mr. Derwent nor Jane made him any answer at all. It was the quiet figure in the window that answered him. And she said, in an unsteady voice, keeping her eyes still fixed upon her work—

"I have been wishing to see you, father."

She had never called him "father" before, and he drew the happiest augury from the word. Her manner, her voice, her look, all seemed strange to him, and unlike herself. Some great change had evidently taken place. Was it possible that Marco was really as false as he wished and believed him to be, and that she knew it, and accepted her fate? If this were the case, he inwardly vowed that nothing should be wanting to induce her to accept the better fate which he was preparing for her. He drew his chair nearer to her, and answered her very gently—

"That is good news for me. I have been very sorry for you, though you have thought me so hard. I hope we are going to understand each other better."

"I have a few questions to ask you," said Lucia, in the same faint, unnatural voice.

"I am ready to answer them," he replied, wondering what was coming.

For a little while nothing came. It seemed to be very difficult to frame these questions.

"I want to hear something about my mother," said Lucia at last.

Mr. Langley was fairly taken by surprise, and he felt that he was changing countenance.

"Ah!" said he, "that is a painful subject."

"*Is this* picture like her?" He would have turned

away if he could, but the open miniature was laid before him on the table, Mr. Derwent and Jane were looking at him, and he felt that he must not falter. But it was hard for him. He had once, if only for a little while, been in love with this woman. He had suffered much at her hands; he had inflicted much suffering upon her. The remembrance of her was dark and bitter; there was nothing in it that he wished to dwell upon—not the brief illusion—not, assuredly, the long awakening.

It was a beautiful face lying before him now, and the likeness to Lucia was marvellous. The age was early girlhood, the costume that of a bride; she had been painted for her first husband.

"She was older than this when I first knew her," said Mr. Langley, in rather a husky voice, as he stooped over the portrait. "What is it that you wish to ask about her?" added he, hurriedly.

"I heard that she was not at all happy," answered Lucia, in an agitated voice. "Perhaps it was her own fault, but still it must be pain to you to remember it. Perhaps you are sorry for it. You can get rid of all the pain and the sorrow now. You can make us so very happy, if you will." She clasped her hands.

What did it mean? Was she speaking of herself and Marco? There was something about her so strange, so unusual, so unreal, that Mr. Langley, with a sudden shudder, thought that her mind might be unsettled. He turned to the Derwents with a look of inquiry and alarm. They encountered him with the same absolute silence.

"I want to love you if you will let me," continued

Lucia. "I know that I ought. Oh, *do* let me! We care so little about the money, we will let you keep it nearly all; we only want to make friends—to forget all that has happened."

"She is ill, is she not?" asked Mr. Langley, in an anxious whisper.

Still the same silence answered him from all but Lucia, who went on with growing earnestness: "You don't know—you don't understand—and I am afraid of telling you, lest I should be disappointed for ever. Oh, go away and leave me alone with him, you two kind friends, and then I will tell him everything!"

Mr. Derwent and Jane rose to comply with this request. Mr. Langley made an attempt to detain them. "Will nobody answer me?" cried he, impatiently; "what is the matter with her?"

"She is quite well," said Jane Derwent, slowly. "Look at her."

He did look at her. Tears were breaking from her eyes, and she hid her face in her hands. "It seems so hard that he should be my father and not care for me," sobbed she.

At that moment the door of the room was burst open, and a new-comer appeared, rushing in as if he had an enemy at his heels. He was a stranger to Mr. Langley, but well known to the other occupants of the room, though somewhat changed since they saw him in the early spring of the year. It was Giuseppe, taller, browner, thinner, with his arm in a sling, and a manly look upon *his young* face, now sparkling all over with joy and eagerness.

"He is come! He is here!" shouted Giuseppe. "Where's Lucia?"

"Upstairs watching," cried Jane Derwent. "Take him to her. Thank God!"

The girl in the window was darting forward, but she checked herself. "Oh, my darling Lucia!" murmured she. "She shall meet him alone—take him to her!"

Past the open door the figure of Marco flashed upstairs, and another figure staggered down to meet him, dropping into his arms and upon his breast with a faint cry of such exquisite happiness, that to hear it once from lips we love might make up for the sufferings of a lifetime.

But who, then, was the girl in the window? She was in the middle of the room now, with the light full on her face. Shorter, slighter, fairer, younger than Lucia, but still wonderfully like her. It was Lilia.

Mr. Langley did not need the explanations which followed to make him understand his fate. For a moment the thought of imposture occurred to him, but he felt that it was hopeless. The truth was visible before him, and the truth destroyed him. It was not only failure—it was not only ruin; it was also disgrace. He was glad to slink away downstairs, scarcely noticed in the tumult of delight which he had left behind him. A stranger who was standing in the hall opened the door for him.

"Are you going, sir?" said he, speaking with a strong foreign accent. "Your daughter will be sorry; she hoped—"

"Who?" gasped Mr. Langley, hardly able to articulate.

"Ah, true, you do not know me. I have the honour to be the husband of your daughter. We were married six months ago."

Already some vague notion had arisen in Mr. Langley's mind of saving himself by the help of Lilia's fortune. It only needed the announcement of her marriage to complete his despair. He passed out of the house like a man in a dream, and wandered aimlessly into the middle of the street, till he was dragged from under the very heads of the horses of an omnibus at full speed, by the hand of the stranger who had given him such unwelcome information.

"You must not cross the street so, you will be killed," said the Italian.

"The gentleman's fainting, sir," said a policeman who stood near. "Shall I call a cab?"

A cab was called, and Mr. Langley was helped in. He did not faint, but the familiar pain was upon him, and it had come so fiercely, that all other fears were lost in the immediate fear of death. He ordered the coachman to drive at once to the house of a celebrated physician.

"You have had a shock," said the doctor, after examining and questioning him.

"Yes," replied the patient.

"Take care you don't have another," was the curt rejoinder.

Mr. Langley collected all his force to inquire the nature of the danger which threatened him, and the doctor, taking him to be a man of firmness and self-control, told him the truth, as doctors sometimes will when it would be

better if they held their peace. He might live many years, but he must avoid excitement, surprise, distress, alarm, or fatigue. Any one of these might kill him; and it would kill him in a moment.

Under the curse of this sentence he *did* live many years in constant, hourly, torturing fear of death. He never went to sleep without rousing himself forcibly two or three times lest the slumber stealing upon him might prove a lethargy from which he was not to wake; he never awaked in the morning without a spasm and a start—without a kind of feverish satisfaction that he had at last begun another day. If he felt weary, if his appetite failed, if his head ached (and it ached often), he said to himself, "It is coming!" And sometimes that cruel pain came, cleaving his breast asunder, and then he said to himself, "It is here!" The terror which had so long lurked in the dark places of his soul had come out into the daylight, and laid fast hold upon him. It was sheer, blank, helpless terror, and the thing which he dreaded was inevitable, and he knew that delay was not escape. In this way he lived on in a foreign country, with all that he was able to save out of the wreck of his fortunes, under a feigned name. The vengeance was complete. Let us hope that there was repentance before the end.

Marco had hoped, but he had not been sure, that Lilia still lived. The persons who had charge of her when Mr. Langley carried Lucia away had been obliged to fly and hide themselves for political reasons. Marco had obtained some particulars which convinced him that the sick girl, whose death was hourly expected when Mr. Langley saw

her, had rallied a little, and had accompanied them in their flight. But he had not dared to awaken Lucia's hopes by telling her this. He knew only the fact that a man who had received the fugitives in the mountain village, where they took refuge after their first day's journey, stated positively that they brought with them a young girl, very ill, apparently dying. It would have been cruel to torture Lucia with anxiety by giving her this fragment of a clue, before he had obtained the means of following it out. Soon after he joined the patriot army in Sicily the way opened before him. The young soldier who had married Lilia—he was a Lombard, and served under Medici—caught Marco's name, and immediately introduced himself. The discovery was a triumph. There could be no scruple about making use of it, as Lilia was safe in her husband's care, and could not be forced into poor Lucia's place. Marco wrote home at once; but, as we know, the letter was burned unread.

Lilia and her husband, escorted by Giuseppe, who was now a gallant *cacciatore delle Alpi*, wounded at Calatafimi, started for England the moment the campaign was over. Military duty detained Marco one week later. His three ambassadors, however, found it an easy task to convince the Derwents. No one could see the sisters together and doubt for a moment which was the elder of the two. Besides, Lilia's recollection tallied with Lucia's, and their joint evidence was unanswerable. Jane Derwent had simply to accept as final incontrovertible truth the history which Lucia had presented to her from the beginning, and which she had been alternately accepting and rejecting ever since.

e were some minor points which still re-
tion, and the house, as Mr. Derwent ob-
ll of questions and answers all day long.
Langley's offences, perhaps, there was not
akled so deeply in Jane's mind, which so ut-
d and disgusted her, as the skilful manner in
d contrived to make her believe that "Maude"
ceptible, and that her manners were wanting in
ignity and modesty. Jane could have forgiven
ing more easily than his sudden fable about the
tuner. It had exactly answered its purpose,
emed to Jane that she had committed a small
le wrong against Lucia by taking so false a view
or so many weeks. Mr. Langley knew well that
would make a woman of Jane's age and character
nt and so distrustful as a hint of this kind; and if
been likely to trouble himself by any question as
th or falsehood, he would have quieted his con-
n a moment by a theory which he shared in com-
h men of better principles than himself—namely,
l girls were ready for mischief if they had the op-
r." The particular example was suggested to
the sight of a vulgar, flashy, impudent-looking
tanding on the platform; and it was needed in
account for Lucia's violent agitation, which was
r attributable to a very different cause. A letter
e had written to Marco had been discovered and
ted that very [redacted] poor girl, not yet
with her lover [redacted] akill, nor with
ers of the ub[redacted]ed that she

was being carried into hopeless obscurity, and that she could be neither traced nor rescued.

Lilia, who was very soft-hearted, sentimental, and credulous (a good little woman, too), could not bear to be persuaded that her father's heart was not to be reached, and she easily obtained permission to try her sanguine experiment upon him, though no one except herself had a hope that it could succeed. Whether the offer which she made on the spur of the moment, to give up her own fortune and Lucia's, would have been endorsed by the two husbands, we will not presume to decide; and we leave in the like obscurity the question whether a repentance so purchased would have been worth its price. At one time it seemed improbable that any part of the inheritance of the sisters could be recovered, after the house of Langley and Dennis had broken down. But matters improved in the end, and Jane was able to avail herself without scruple of Lucia's generosity (Lucia called it gratitude), and to go, full of joy, energy, and aspiration, to that atelier in Florence where she is now regularly qualifying herself for the profession of her choice, and where the southern air has so softened and enervated Mr. Derwent that he has more than once been heard to accept a suggestion. Some people, however, attribute his compliances to his imperfect knowledge of Italian, and think that when he says "si" he believes that it means "if;" so that he can only be supposed to be in a state of questioning and conditional acquiescence. Emma, we must not forget to say, was happily married before her father and sister left England.

Happiness is a strong medicine, and Lucia's one week of

joyful expectation went far towards repairing the injuries which her months of suffering had inflicted. But there was better reparation in store. Not a paleness had flitted across her cheek, not a tear had fallen from her eyes, which Marco did not count and register as a debt which it was now his joyful business to pay. To one who has been through the furnace it must seem strange to be guarded lest the winds of heaven should visit her face too roughly. But this guardianship is Lucia's life now.

NINA.

A TALE FOR THE TWILIGHT.

I.

ON a remote part of the south-eastern coast of Spain, about a mile beyond the edge of the sea, there is—or was, in those far-off days to which our tale is about to conduct us—a very remarkable rocky islet. The entire area of its surface did not extend over more than three acres, the level space scarcely over one; its bold and precipitous cliffs, which rose to a perpendicular height of more than two hundred feet, were scarped and shattered at their crests, assuming a variety of fantastic and irregular shapes, and thence sloping downwards towards the centre, where they contained a tiny meadow of the softest green spangled with flowers, and suggesting to the gazer the idea of a little nosegay half buried in the depth of a gigantic lava vase. The volcanic origin of the rock was not to be mistaken; but there was not even a traditional record of an eruption; and so, in the quiet lapse of ages, there had been leisure for the seeds of vegetation to accumulate in

the central hollow, and, sheltered from the winds and waves by the natural rampart around them, and watered only by the dews of heaven, to bear their humble but increasing fruit year by year.

Very thin and feeble was the growth at first—a mere skin upon the granite skeleton—but it gathered volume by degrees. Each season added a fresh layer to the shallow soil; wandering birds, from time to time, dropped an alms into its scanty treasury, in the shape of some new seed; and, after a while, the rains, filtering downwards and accumulating in some unseen reservoir in the heart of the rock, became so impatient of their self-chosen prison that, after beating themselves in vain against its barriers in all directions, they found themselves an upward passage at last, and reappeared at the surface in a slender bubbling spring. The little history is not without a parallel in a different sphere of existence. Thus does a slow deposit of gentler feelings gather sometimes in the heart which has been so torn and shattered by passion, that it is left bare and desolate, long unconscious of the invisible work within it. But the growth goes on: the dews of heaven nourish it; chance thoughts, chance affections, angel-sown, enrich it; secret waters spring up, like Hagar's desert fountain, to renew its faint and wavering life; and, at length, the flowers which wayward youth rejected, are seen to nestle and blossom in the bosom of age.

For a long while Nature laboured alone and unseen at her happy task of healing. Wonderful are the charities which she works in secret; and strangely is the heart of *man* humbled, when some solitary instance is, for the first

time, revealed to him—when he perceives how silently, and how diligently, and how proudly, without one thought of him, she has toiled on, during periods of time which his puny faculties are unable even to measure, and achieved, for her own delight and God's glory, some masterpiece of beauty and power. He gazes, and his mind hurries back, and tries to bear her company through those centuries of labour without witness and without praise, and he wonders if there be any human work as patient, as secret, and as slow to blossom, which shall bear a fruit as glorious when the ages have passed into eternity!

The first visitor to our islet was one of that nation of anchorets which was diffused over the wild and lonely regions of Christian Europe in the early ages of the Church, setting the seal of God upon many a fastness unmeet for the use of man. A rude little chapel, or rather oratory, of unhewn stone, surmounted by its simple wooden cross, and sheltered from the fury of the elements by an overhanging crag; a basin, hollowed for the reception of the waters of the one streamlet, ere it hurried down to the sea through a natural fissure in the side of the rock; a few herbs and roots, such as are in all times supposed to constitute the *pièce de résistance* of a hermit's dinner-table; and a narrow path, worn by the constant pressure of feet, in one uniform course to and fro, along the edge of the turf—these were the first signs of habitation.

After a while other signs were added. The unchanging daily walk began, when years had witnessed its constant renewal, to show some traces even on the surface of the unyielding rock; and the footsteps of the solitary might

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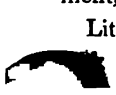
the very base of the rock on which he stood. To undo the rope which was kept for such emergencies, to fling it down, to utter cries, now of prayer to the Virgin, now of encouragement to the hapless being struggling in the water; these were the work of a moment, but they were unavailing. The exhausted man made scarcely an effort to reach the means of safety, but, with upturned face, and eyes which seemed to implore the help which it was impossible to accord, sank never to rise again. The memory of this terrible spectacle long haunted the couch of the poor hermit, breaking even those brief and limited seasons of repose which the observance of his vows permitted to him. Again and again he started from his sleep, shivering with terror and pity, as his dreams presented to him that upturned and beseeching face, with the ruthless waves closing over it; again and again he commended the soul of the unknown to God, and sought to calm his troubled mind and excited nerves by prayer. On one of these occasions, when the vision had been more than commonly importunate and terrific, he sprang up, and, moved by an irresistible impulse, rushed to his oratory, where, falling prostrate before the sacred Image, he vowed that from that night forward a beacon-light should burn upon the crag to warn the unwary mariner of the perils he was approaching. As the vision gradually ceased to torment him he was confirmed in his idea that this vow, which he failed not most religiously to observe, had been the immediate suggestion of divinity. The beacon of San Pablo (so was our islet named) became a well-known mentor upon the seas, and according to the usual fate of mentors

of all sorts, even when its warnings were attended to, its neighbourhood was scrupulously avoided.

When the good hermit died, a successor was found to undertake the same pious office, and to lead the same monotonous days. For some years, therefore, the isolation of San Pablo was complete, none approaching it whether from sea or land, with the occasional exception of some zealous pilgrim, who, either as a penance or an act of voluntary self-devotion, breasted the waters to watch a night with the solitary, and departed at morn, soothed and strengthened by his benediction.

At length came an interval, during which the beacon ceased to burn. The last hermit was dead, and no successor had assumed the dominion of his little kingdom. Without metaphor the light of a life was quenched, and the darkness which followed might be felt.

The fishermen of the coast, for whom the hermits of San Pablo could scarcely be said to have any personal existence, looked upon this blank in the series with fear rather than with sorrow. A beneficent genius had ceased to protect them, and the demon of the storm might now wreak his fury upon them unchecked. By a singular but natural consequence, deeds of crime and rapine—always common enough in those wild old days—increased rapidly amongst them. The visible presence of charity—the constant and eloquent witness to a higher life—was gone: its unconscious working, both for restraint and encouragement, was no more.

Little, perhaps, had those simple dwellers upon the  dreamed when they kindled their solitary beacon,

that it was shining into hearts as well as over waters—hearts full, indeed, of darkness and cruelty, yet still dimly conscious of an affinity with the light—feebly capable of shame before its rebuking presence. It is a comfort to remember that the consequences of one good deed are often as vast in their ramification, as interminable in their extent, as those of a single sin. The dark shadow of the latter too frequently haunts the disturbed and sorrowful spirit of the sinner through life, whispering words of bitterness and despair. But courage and comfort! Perchance his own hands have been unconsciously helping to weave that invisible chain whose links shall prove strong enough to save him when he is about to plunge into the abyss, and draw him gently upward to safer and brighter regions. God forgets not the prayers of his youth, nor the works of his riper years; not even the cup of cold water is unrecorded; and there is great patience with our Father which is in heaven. He has more pity for his children than they have, each for his brethren.

The fishermen rejoiced when, after nearly a year of eclipse, the star of San Pablo shone forth again. They gathered together upon the shore, and watched it with eyes of awe and thankfulness, marvelling whether human hands had kindled it, or whether the spirit of the departed anchoret, grieved by the misfortunes of those whom he had protected in life, had returned to minister to them again. The latter conjecture derived some probability from the circumstance that no boat had been seen to approach the islet—a negative argument to which the credulous peasants seemed to attach as much weight as would really have be-

longed to it had they been watching the shores of San Pablo night and day for a fortnight; whereas, in fact, storms and fogs had been so rife upon the coast of late, that a fleet might have landed unperceived. And when a fisherman assured his comrades that while he was casting his nets in the moonlight he had distinctly seen a dark figure of colossal dimensions flitting around the flame of the beacon, the evidence was complete. Not even a pilgrim would venture to San Pablo now. Watching a night with a ghost was a penance which no amount of sin could be supposed to deserve. It was rumoured, indeed, that a father confessor at Gerona, well known to possess a very inquiring mind, had once ventured to impose the task upon a more than commonly zealous penitent; but the supplicant besought so earnestly and so pertinaciously that the priest would accompany him, and aid the enterprise by his presence and his prayers, that the good man thought better of it, and commuted the penance.

One day, however, the mystery was solved. A boat was seen to issue from behind a projecting crag of San Pablo and approach the shore, avoiding, as if by intuition, the dangers of reef and shallow. As it was about to enter the surf, the peasants, who had been watching it with intense curiosity, ran down to the sands to receive it: there was safety in numbers they thought; and a spectre by daylight was not so very terrific. The boat did not land, however; it stopped within earshot of the assembled fishermen; and its only tenant, a man certainly of immense height and strength, but wearing a garb similar to their own, and looking, with his black matted hair, savage

eyes, and foul hands, as unlike the ghost of a gentle hermit as it is possible to conceive, stood up and addressed them in a harsh authoritative voice :—

"I am Juan of Ripol, and I hold the island of San Pablo in fief from the Lord of Urgel. Give me tribute of your fish and your flocks, and the beacon of San Pablo shall burn for you by night as of old."

The command would scarcely have been resisted even had it not been supported by the dreaded name of the Lord of Urgel, brother to the powerful Count of Barcelona, and now, during the illness and imbecility of the Count himself, administering the affairs of the kingdom. The cruelty, the ambition, and the talent of Suniario, Lord of Urgel, rendered him the terror of his people; and when it was remembered that since his accession to the sovereign power, the Moors, though habituated to victory under the banner of the mighty Abderrahman, had entirely withdrawn from Catalonia, there were not wanting those who asserted that its lord was secretly in league with the infidel—a thing hateful and horrible to all good Christians. The scared peasants hastened to bring their offerings, and two of them acceded at once to Juan's surly request that they would return with him and help him to land his stores. An ample supply of fish and bread, a stock of wood and pitch for the beacon, and two live goats, constituted the tribute; and when the fishermen, who had assisted in transporting it, returned to their impatient comrades, they averred that a great change had taken place in the island of San Pablo. The oratory was in part pulled down, having been found, so Juan murmured, somewhat

larger than needful; and with its stones, and others either quarried upon the islet or conveyed thither by some inscrutable means, a low but substantial tower had been erected, from the door of which Juan's wife had come forth to greet her lord, followed by a strong-limbed, swarthy personage, who seemed to be their servant. The basin which held the waters of the stream had been deepened and enlarged; and the neglected herb-garden of the solitary showed traces of recent extension and cultivation. But the wild sea-birds, which abounded upon these rocks, had issued in troops from their holes in the cliffs, and wheeled round and round the heads of the fishermen, flapping their wings, and uttering unearthly and plaintive cries. When they ceased for a while, and the fishermen could look upwards, they saw that the Cross had fallen from the roof of the oratory, and no hand had replaced it.

There was, however, one member of Juan's household who had escaped the notice of the fishermen. When they had departed, and when the two men and the woman, after standing a little while engaged in deep conversation, had withdrawn into the tower, a head was suddenly protruded above the edge of the rock which overhung the ruined oratory.

It was a young, lovely head, covered with waving auburn tresses, which sparkled as though sunbeams had been woven amongst them; while, from under this bright tangle, two of the darkest, deepest, wildest blue eyes that ever were beheld looked curiously and timidly out. A pair of small, white shoulders next emerged, shining like stalactites upon the dark rocks; and in another instant

the entire figure of a little girl, about eight years old, became visible. Her dress was a tunic or shift, of the commonest and coarsest description, girt round her tiny waist by a strap of leather, and leaving her arms bare to the shoulder, and her legs wellnigh to the knee. Though tanned by exposure to the elements, her limbs were of the finest and most delicate mould; her small figure was erect and airy; and her natural coronet of sunny curls seemed well placed upon a head which rose above the falling shoulders, from a neck curved and lofty as that of the swan. It was perhaps this peculiar form, so unusual in early childhood, which had obtained for her the sobriquet of *Cisné*, or Cygnet, by which she was so habitually addressed that her real name seemed to be forgotten.

She swung herself over the edge of the crag, and descended to the level ground, using her little hands and feet with movements so rapid that she seemed rather to fly than climb. As she was springing forward, she stopped suddenly before the spot where the goats were beginning to browse and trying to make themselves at home in their new habitation, clapped her hands together, and uttered a suppressed exclamation of delight.

Standing there with her clasped hands, smiling lips, head thrown back, and one fairy foot planted firmly in advance, the goats did not seem to consider her a very awful invader of their territory. They raised their heads, it is true, and interrupted their dinner to look at her; they rubbed their noses together as if comparing notes, and then looked again more curiously than before. Finally, they made up their minds that this was an acquaintance which

ought to be cultivated; and, moved perchance by the recollection of the fisherman's youngest daughter, who had been accustomed to bring them certain delicacies in the shape of oaten cakes and ears of barley, they held their horned brows aloft, uttered their most engaging bleats, and deliberately trotted up to her. When the little creature saw this, her rapture knew no bounds. She flung her arms round their necks, kissed their rough, hairy foreheads, danced round and round them, leaping high in the air—and finally, as if not knowing how to get rid of the exuberance of her spirits, began to run at full speed up and down the furthest extent of the meadow; the goats gazing at her for a little while in solemn astonishment, and then, somewhat uncouthly, joining the race.

When she was completely out of breath she stopped, cast herself down upon the turf, having her arm about the neck of each of her fourfooted companions, and, drawing them closely to her side, nestled between them, and began to cover them with caresses, and to whisper the most melodious words of endearment to each in turn. These were the first articulate sounds she had uttered; and, indeed, no part of the spectacle would have seemed so strange to a witness as the total silence of the excited little performer. No ringing bursts of merriment—no childish outcries and shouts—had accompanied her swift and joyous movements. But for that first soft, half-stifled exclamation, and for a low, murmuring, almost noiseless laugh—not louder and not less incessant than the trickling of a smooth streamlet along the sands, or the pattering of her own small bare feet upon the turf, as she ran and leaped in her delight—

you might have believed that the faculty of voice was denied her, so strange did it seem that her childish ecstasy found no expression in sound. And now, the honeyed names which she lavished upon her favourites, as she lay crouched between them, were whispered like secrets into their ears, and audible to none save themselves. While she was thus employed, the constant flow of tender epithets being only interrupted by an occasional gush of the inaudible laughter to which we have alluded, and which never failed to break forth when either of the goats made any movement which seemed to her irresistibly ludicrous or delightful, her quick ears caught a footfall upon the threshold of the tower. She was up in an instant—swift and scared as a fawn which hears a human tread in the brushwood—and with the extraordinary rapidity already noticed, she had flown back to her crag, scaled it, and disappeared behind it, ere the goats had time to do more than rise to their feet and stare about them, wondering what had become of their quicksilver playmate, or ere the new comer had issued forth upon the meadow.

It was Juan's wife—a tall, pallid, hard-featured woman, with a strong expression of lassitude and coldness. She stood still a moment after she had crossed the threshold, looking around her, and, when she perceived no one, she approached the side where the child had disappeared, and called her gently by her name, "Cygnet! little Cygnet!"

Little Cygnet hesitated not an instant, but came flying down the face of the rock as swiftly as before, but with a difference. No random bounds into the air now; no clay-

ping of the tiny hands as she ran; no dancing step like the course of a rivulet over the pebbles. She sped to her mark straight as arrow, and paused not for the hundredth part of a second, nor so much as turned her airy head, till she stood at the feet of her mistress—surely it could not be her mother. It *could* not be her mother; for, as the little sunbeam drew near, there was not the faintest dawn—not the most transient twilight upon that grey, passionless countenance. The woman looked as though she had an india-rubber soul, which, if forcibly stretched to any extent, would return to its own narrow dimensions as soon as the external force was withdrawn; and from which, moreover, the waters of life would fall away, incapable either of penetrating or of refreshing it. Yet it might be rather like the sand, which is so dry and so hard, not because it repels, but because it absorbs and hides the tears which the tide leaves upon it.

Little Cygnet stood still and received her supper—a cake of black bread—from the hand of this repulsive-looking dame, in silence. She then sat down upon the grass and began to eat it, while the woman went forward to milk the goat. Cygnet received her share in a small horn drinking-cup, and the rest was carried by Dame Pacheta into the tower, where the elders of the family took their evening meal apart from the child. Little Cygnet did not fail to invite the goats to her banquet as soon as she was left in unmolested supremacy over her own arrangements; and I can answer for it that, this evening at least, the guests had the larger portion of the supper. She was so perfectly happy with her new companions, that she quite dreaded

the hour of wishing them good-night, and going away from them into the dark tower, so much lonelier to her than rocks, and sea, and sky had ever been, even before there were these visible living creatures to bear her company. "Only then," she thought, "I shall see them again to-morrow morning, and I can think of them if I lie awake." And she nodded familiarly to them, as if she knew they understood and approved what was passing in her mind; and asked them in whispers how they liked their supper, and read their answers in their grave, winking eyes; and made all kinds of speeches to them; and played all kinds of pranks with them; and believed in her heart that they had souls ten times as reasonable as those of Juan and his wife. Presently the sky grew dark, and the silvery stars began to blossom forth upon its surface like daisies upon a wide, unbroken lawn. One star was an old friend of Cygnet's; and it was quite with a sensation of guilt and ingratitude, that she perceived it had been shining upon her for some time, unnoticed by her in the midst of her attentions to her new friends. She looked up at it eagerly, and smiled and nodded as she had been used to do, thinking, as she always did, that the quivering and twinkling of the stars was the only way in which they could show that they were alive and happy, and knew what she was about. And she pitied the poor, beautiful moon because it was so still, and had no language, and could do nothing; and because, after she had watched it grow from a baby-crescent to a mature orb, it always shrank and faded away by degrees till it quite died, and went out like an extinguished torch; and she could not at

first love the next moon so well, because it was quite a stranger to her. Sometimes she wondered whether it was a great flower—like the rose which had grown by the door of her former home—and, when it had budded, and blossomed, and expanded, it faded and dropped off, and a new bud came. She liked to think this, because then it was the same moon-plant that she was always looking at, though the moon-flowers were different; and she wondered whether, if she were to hunt very carefully, there would be any chance of her finding one of the withered moon-flowers which had dropped down upon the earth. All the flowers in that great garden up in the sky were very beautiful, and seemed to be made of something much more radiant and wonderful than the flowers upon the earth; but she thought in her heart how much she wished that He who made them had been able to teach them how to move, and utter sounds, and look at her with real meaning eyes, like her two dear goats. And she wished her star good night several times, and looked hard at it, and thought, perhaps, if it were not so far off she should hear it answer her; and then she crept softly into the tower, and stole through the outer chamber unnoticed by the inmates, who were deep in some important conversation. Up the ladder she ran, and ere she lay down upon the mat which was placed in one corner of the upper room, and which served her for a couch, she knelt for a minute before a rude crucifix, suspended against the wall, and pronounced a short Latin prayer which had been taught her by Dame Pacheca, but of which neither teacher *nor* pupil understood one single word. Dame Pacheca

had taught her, nevertheless, that it was a prayer, and that it must be duly said; and she had, moreover, told her the name of Him who hung upon that Cross, and that He was all-powerful and all-merciful, and had died for all men. And little Cygnet, dimly apprehending this wonderful history, and embracing this creed which, though she understood it not, seemed, in some strange way, to clasp itself about her heart, repeated her Ave in considerable terror of mind, not knowing what would happen to her if she forgot it, yet doubting much whether as the words had such mysterious power, they would not some night call forth out of the darkness something, she knew not what—she only knew that she feared its coming. But as she was told that yonder pale figure represented One who was as kind as He was strong, and as she knew nothing upon earth that was kind as well as strong, she always looked at It, with a strange feeling compounded of confidence and pity, wishing that she could bind up those sad wounds, and thinking that she was somehow safer in Its presence. And when she had finished her prayer, she would say, almost unconsciously, and certainly not well knowing why she said it, or when she had first begun to say it, "Pray Jesus Christ take care of me!" And then, with something of a sense of escape, and of awe removed, poor little human creature that she was! she would bound away to her couch, and be asleep in an instant.

II.

The rude tower, which Juan of Ripol had constructed for the abode of his family, consisted of three chambers:

two on the ground-floor, and a species of loft above, in which he, his wife, and little Cygnet slept. The servant, whose name was Enrique, slept in the kitchen; which was also, according to the comprehensive habit of those simple times, *salon, salle à manger,* and *salle de réception.* In short, it was an epitome of domestic appliances, and comprised the whole stock and store of the family comforts. These were scanty enough. A fire-place, which enjoyed its full share of the wood provided for the beacon; a few wooden settles, and a couple of boards upon trestles, which performed the office of tables; a cupboard in the wall, containing sundry dishes and utensils of the rudest possible description; a cask of dried and salted meat, another of meal, and a third, containing some kind of fermented liquor, analogous, perhaps, to the mead of the Northern Goths—and the catalogue was complete. A door, defended by more than one strong bolt and bar, communicated with the second chamber, which Juan reserved for his own use only, and to which no one but Enrique, and he only on rare occasions, was admitted. He had chosen to place this apartment immediately over the cavern which had been the retreat of the former inhabitants of San Pablo, and which it is necessary to describe with some particularity.

This cavern, the refuge of the hermits of San Pablo in stormy weather, and their ordinary bed-room during the colder half of the year, was a natural hollow of no great size, in the very heart of the island. It had two outlets: one to the sea, between two projecting crags, which entirely concealed it, except when you were directly opposite,

situated a few feet above the level of the water, and so small that it served only to admit a scanty supply of light and air; the other, consisting of an upward passage, the orifice of which was now in the floor of Juan's private apartment. This second outlet was a long, sloping, sinuous corridor, full of all manner of jagged projections and sharp edges, and in some places so confined as to be passable with difficulty. When it approached the cavern, it descended suddenly for some feet, then expanding a little, terminated abruptly in an aperture through which a man might pass easily to the chamber beyond. But the level of the rock which composed the floor of this inner chamber, was at least ten feet below the base of the aperture, and it must have been an edifying spectacle to behold the venerable anchorites suspended by their arms, and struggling anxiously in the folds of the black petticoats which hermits always wear, as they descended nightly by the help of a few irregularities and cracks in the side of the cavern, and went breathless to bed. One of Juan's first steps when he became master of San Pablo, was to secure each end of this passage by a strong grated door. He then built his tower above it as we have already described, and secured the door of the chamber which communicated with it, as strongly as he had already defended the passage itself. Little Cygnet was in the corner watching the arrangement of the bars, and wondering for what purpose they were put up, when Dame Pacheca's lifted finger —a signal which she well knew—warned her to escape before Juan discovered her presence; and she fled, fast and far, as she ever did when thus admonished, dread-

ing the harsh word or rough blow, which had too often taught her to avoid her stern master. When, however, three unknown men, who had followed Juan to San Pablo in a second boat, who had helped in conveying the stores and materials for building, and had lent their aid in the construction of the tower, were about to depart, little Cygnet, who was both curious and fearless by nature, stole down to the place of embarkation, and peeped behind an angle of the rock in the hope of seeing their faces. He who seemed to be the leader of the party, was just about to enter the boat as she came up; he turned to Juan, saying, in a tone half-affirmative, half-interrogatory, "Everything is ready then," and the child caught a momentary glimpse of his face. She shrank back, shuddering with terror. She had seen that fierce, forbidding countenance before. It frowned upon her like the shadowy outline of some forgotten object seen through a mist so dense that we cannot discern the true shape, while the fragmentary glimpses, which we catch from time to time, mock, contradict, yet stimulate our imperfect memory. Where and how was it? And where was the benignant face which yonder dark aspect recalled to her, by some strange, link whether of contrast or likeness, or companionship—belonging, she knew not why, to the same faint, half-effaced picture in her remembrance? What thoughts came with those faces—what was the life of which they formed a part? There was no answer to this question—not even a flitting shadow, appearing for an instant, and eluding her gaze and her grasp. A dim sense of light—of a brighter, broader, loftier space than any in which she was accus-

tomed to move, save when she was under the canopy of heaven only—a quick but perfectly distinct and vivid impression of the touch of a silken curtain between her fingers—this was all that memory would do for her. Strange was it that the touch of that curtain was the only thought which seemed definite and real; she put out her little hand as if she expected to feel it again; all the rest was dreamy and transient. And so, after a few puzzled and scarcely conscious efforts to remember, she gave the matter up, and thought no more about it. It was not till after the departure of the unknown guests, and the completion of the tower, that Juan lighted his beacon, and introduced himself to his neighbours.

Little Cygnet was soon as much at home in her island dwelling, as she had been in that hut in the Pyrenees which she left to come to it. There was, in fact, but small difference in her life. There, as here, the goats, the earth, and the skies, had been her only companions, and by them, such capacities of affection as were at all developed in her character, were entirely filled. Fear was the only discipline of which she was conscious, but her nature was strangely constituted, and suffered, as yet, but little injury from this unkindly training. Perhaps the sensibilities were slow to awaken, but, however that may have been, there was a fund of vigour and a hue of health about her mental constitution, which it seemed impossible to exhaust or to wither.

Of two flowers crushed beneath the same fallen rock, you may see the one break, and droop, and die, while the other, though compressed, and distorted, and impri-

soned, will yet contrive to force a passage for some audacious shoot, and thrust forth a perfect harvest of crowded blossoms in some crevice between the rock above and the earth below it. There is something touching in this obstinate struggle for life and bloom, under all conceivable discouragements. How much more, when the life and the bloom are those of a living soul—of a flower from God's own garden! And thus was it with our poor little Cisné. Though often terrified, she was never dejected, and her one unfailing remedy for all disasters was—to run away. When her flying, flashing feet had borne her in an instant beyond the reach of the sounds and looks that she feared, and she could sit down unmolested, and paddle with her hand in the pools of the rock, and gather shells and seaweeds, and watch the beautiful sea-flowers shrinking and folding themselves up, as her tiny finger touched their moving tendrils; and nod and smile to her faithful goats; and pierce with her eyes and thoughts the log red vistas of sunset, or wait, in eager hope, for the first gleam of her favourite star; there was not a happier creature in the world. Experience had taught her that she need not dread pursuit, nor was confinement—the only process which could effectually have broken and tamed her buoyant spirit—ever attempted. She learned obedience by instinct, as the only means of avoiding suffering, and spent all the little time that she was obliged to spend in the presence of her elders, in waiting either till they should withdraw, or till she could find an opportunity of escaping. They had no place at all in the pictures of her fancy; they did not belong to her life. How they got there she could

not tell, but she felt pretty sure that it was by some mistake, and she looked upon them as certain necessary and inexplicable obstacles, which must be got over, or avoided, before enjoyment could begin.

In the same instinctive, unconscious way, she learned the lessons which had been instilled ever since she could remember—to hide if strangers approached, and not reappear till they departed; to subdue her voice and laugh to the lowest possible pitch; to make her movements as noiseless as they were rapid. These restraints were neither more irksome nor more unintelligible to her, than the conventional laws of sitting still when the limbs are full of quicksilver—not tearing clothes of a fabric so delicate that they seem to be put upon children by the suggestion of some wicked fairy, whose object is to involve mortals in inextricable difficulties, and then punish them for not getting out handsomely—and keeping the hands clean when Heaven has endowed them with an indissoluble affinity for dirt—are to many modern children.

She had an intuitive appetite for happiness which never led her astray, causing her to avoid, almost without knowing that she did so, everything which had once caused pain, and to seize upon everything that seemed to promise pleasure. To use another vegetable simile, she reminded you of one of those pitiable sprays of geranium which, ruthlessly torn from the parent stem, are suspended in phials against the walls of green-houses; the phials, by a refinement of cruelty, containing just so little water, that the poor thirsty prisoners shall not be able to reach it. The majority do as they might be expected to do, and as

indeed they ought to do under the circumstances, die in their agonies; but here and there there is one found hardy enough to baffle its torturers, and, putting forth roots and fibres, to force its way to the water, and become a plant in spite of them.

Our little girl's happiest times were during the absences of Juan and Enrique, which had been, ever since she could remember, neither few nor brief. When the boat which held their two stalwart forms and unpleasant faces had fairly pushed off, and the parting words, "Expect us in a week, a fortnight, or a month," as the case might be, had been uttered, she would bound away to her sports with a feeling rather of sovereignty than of liberty: it was not so much that her spirit felt a weight withdrawn, as that it received a sudden influx of buoyancy which made it ready to soar to the skies. Of the cold, weak statue-woman, Dame Pacheca, she was by no means afraid; she was sensible of no emotion of any sort towards her, except a kind of animal gratitude for being fed and clothed, coarsely and scantily enough. But our Cygnet had by nature a spirit as proud as her bearing; a quick, impetuous, vehement, not to say violent, temper, and all sorts of wayward moods and wilful fancies. But for her instinctive womanly horror of seeing or inflicting pain, she might have grown up hardhearted. However, with her intense and ignorant sympathies all awake, seeing life in everything around her, and believing herself endowed with limitless powers of giving or taking away the delights of all those speechless sentient creatures, this was happily impossible.

She could not sever a sea-anemone from its rock without a sense of despotism and responsibility; and after she had duly examined it, she always restored it in the most conscientious manner to the precise spot from which it was taken. And if things went wrong with her, and, in the outbreaks of her childish passion, she would stamp her feet and clap her hands, and fling the shell or the flower which had offended her far away into the sea (no unfrequent occurrence, I am sorry to say, in the chronicle of her island nursery), she would weep when her wrath had subsided, not for shame or penitence, but for pure sorrow at the pain which she had doubtless caused. To her goats she was scarcely ever impatient. Their life was something too prominent and personal to be overlooked, even when she was in a passion; and on the only occasion on which she was ever known to strike one of them, she wept for a day in the fear that she should never be forgiven. She looked upon Dame Pacheca as inferior to the goats in mind, and to the flowers and stars in outward beauty, and thought it strangely unjust that she should possess the faculty of speech which was denied to the first, and the power of motion which she so earnestly desired for the others.

She soon discovered that Dame Pacheca was not difficult to manage; and, after this, managed her whenever she had occasion, without being at all conscious that she did so. Juan continued to be the ogre of her life, by whose presence all ordinary laws were suspended, and in whose very glance there was danger; and she was somehow sensible that Dame Pacheca understood the evil signs better than she did—as sailors learn to detect the sleeping

tempest in a sky which looks harmless to landsmen—and she therefore hesitated not to obey implicitly and instantly every signal which warned her that a speedy escape was advisable. One thing struck her as curious, when she grew older and began to observe a little more accurately: it was that this fierce, hard, savage Juan so seldom exhibited his ferocity towards Dame Pacheca. She seemed to have somehow discovered a warm—or, perhaps, we should rather say a less cold—nook in his heart, and to have established herself there in permanence. He sometimes spoke to her without an oath; and once, when she was ill, he looked sorrowful. Nay, when she recovered and came as usual, only a shade greyer and colder than before, to set the broiled fish upon the table and take her seat beside it, he glanced at her so mildly, and she returned the glance with something so like the dim reflection of a smile, that Cygnet thought they looked for a moment—almost as nice as her goats.

One morning—the family had been about a year on the island, and Juan had been absent on one of his mysterious excursions—little Cygnet awoke under the impression that her slumbers had been visited by a very remarkable dream. She dreamed that she was asleep on her own couch, and that she was aroused by an unwonted sound, as of some heavy substance dropped suddenly into the water; a dull, deep plash, such as she had never heard before, which terrified her she knew not why. She started up, and looked from the narrow loophole in the wall, through which the sea was visible; but there was nothing save the ceaseless swaying of the waves, as they softly pushed each

other through the bright barrier of moonshine, and continued their slumberous dance on the other side. As she watched them, and wondered whether they ever slept, and what they were whispering to each other, and whether they were warm in the moonlight, and cold when they entered the shadow, she perceived that, though the night was far advanced, there was a lamp burning in the chamber below. She crept to the top of the ladder, and peeped cautiously over, fearing in her dream, as she would have feared if awake, that Juan might have returned unexpectedly. Nor was her fear vain, for Dame Pacheca, whom she had supposed to be quietly asleep in her bed, was in the very act of opening the door to him.

Little Cygnet was about to steal away, dreading to be discovered, when her curiosity was so strongly excited, that she could not help remaining at all risks.

Juan was followed into the house by Enrique and two other men, half leading, half supporting a third stranger, who seemed incapable of standing without assistance. As they passed across the foot of the ladder into the chamber, she could see that his arms and legs were strongly bound with cords. They placed him on a seat, and little Cygnet stooped as far forward as she dared, in the hope of seeing his face. He was young—not more than twenty—and his countenance was noble and majestic, but it expressed a grief too fresh and powerful to be altogether suppressed; and as the child looked at him, she could see two great tears roll down his cheeks, which he made an impatient though vain effort to brush away with his fettered hand.

His dress was a shirt of woven steel, such as she had

seen Juan wear; but the soiled and torn mantle which hung from his shoulder seemed to be of some rich and gay material; and the iron cap, which Juan and Enrique roughly took from his head, was adorned with a streaming white plume. There was blood on his forehead and on his garments; and Dame Pacheca now approached, summoned by a whisper from her husband, and washed and bound two gaping wounds; the one partly concealed by his disordered dark hair, some of which she was obliged to cut away; the other a terrible gash in the sword-arm. At this latter wound he gazed, when she removed the mail covering that she might stanch and bind it, with an expression of pride and anger, murmuring to himself, in a faint though scornful voice, "But for thee I were not here."

Little Cygnet saw and heard no more; for, as soon as the stranger pronounced these words—the first which had been uttered aloud—Juan and Enrique seized him by the shoulders, and hurried him to the inner side of the chamber, which was not visible from the place where she stood. She fancied that she heard the opening and closing of a door, but she was too much frightened to observe any further; for, in another instant, Juan himself was upon the ladder, and the poor listener was on her bed, and feigning sleep, ere he had ascended a single step. He brought the lamp with him, strode to her bedside, and held it mercilessly above her closed eyes, which she had fortunately covered with one small rosy arm. Apparently her stillness satisfied him, for he withdrew without taking any further notice of her; and little Cygnet lay and trembled for a

while, but knew no more till she awaked in the morning.

She did not at first remember her dream; and when she thought of it she was puzzled and bewildered. She could not tell whether it was fact or fancy. It was new to her to encounter the presence of human beings in her visions, whether sleeping or waking. Talking flowers, and dancing stars, and wonderful fish, that bore her on their backs over vast oceans glittering like liquid sunlight—these were the inhabitants of her dream-world; and Heaven only knows what strange fantastic scenes her young imagination enacted amongst them as she sat at evening-time, in some nest among the rocks, gazing for hours over the slowly darkening waters; not knowing, herself, of what she thought, nor by what sweet unspeakable influence she was refreshed and charmed. Men and women were of too mean a mould to be admitted into such company. But now a new and stately shape had intruded amongst her dream-people; and she knew not whence it came, nor how she ought to receive it.

As she passed out to her accustomed sports, she perceived, with a thrill of wonder and fear, that Juan was seated beside the fireplace, and Enrique standing near him. They had, then, returned in the night! But this was no uncommon occurrence, and she discovered no trace of their having been accompanied by others. No allusion was made, no hint dropped; there was nothing to recall or to explain the strange spectacle of the past night; and, framed as it was in sleep, the child soon learned to look upon it as a picture in a dream.

Nor did her dreams fail to repeat it frequently; sometimes without change, sometimes with all sorts of grotesque additions and impossible variations; and so, in time, she began to consider it only as a first of a series, and to grow familiar with it as with the other inhabitants of her chambers of imagery.

And so time sped on; and, unnoticed, unfostered, uncared-for, the wild, solitary child was growing and unfolding into a girlhood as beautiful and as silent as the youth of the rose.

III.

The next event in the history of our island queen, or island captive—for she was in truth either, according to the aspect in which we choose to look upon her—was the death of Dame Pacheca. Some very singular circumstances accompanied it, causing a change in the thoughts of little Cygnet, and a passionate yearning in her heart, which, as it had no object to fix upon, no channel by which it could be relieved, seemed almost capable of unseating her reason.

Dame Pacheca had been ill for some weeks, and at last was unable to rise from her bed. Juan nursed her himself with a sort of surly tenderness, and was unwilling to allow the girl to approach her; after a while, he harshly and positively forbade it. The poor woman faded away daily; and whenever Cygnet caught a glimpse of her sallow and pain-worn countenance, it expressed a trouble —an anxiety—almost a terror which spoke of an uneasy death-bed. Often her feeble voice might be heard plead-

ing with her husband for something which he seemed to refuse. It was but by the tones that Cygnet could judge of the meaning, for they never spoke thus when she was actually in the room; but the beseeching, plaintive accents could not be mistaken, and their constant recurrence proved that the boon was not obtained. The girl's heart was full of heaviness and wonder, and at length she found courage to break that habit of silence which had now become so entirely part of herself that you might have supposed her without the faculty of speech, and to question Enrique.

"What is it ails Dame Pacheca?" asked she, in a low, trembling voice.

Enrique started as though he had really believed her to be dumb; and answered, after a moment's consideration,—

"Nothing will ail her soon. Death stands by her pillow."

Cygnet shuddered. The cold fear which was hiding in her heart had sprung forth and grasped her. A little cloud lying on the horizon, and all suffused with the amber sunset or ruddy dawn, seemed to swell in an instant, and cover the sky with its huge black pall, and blot out all the light and colour of the earth. It was pure fear she felt; and she scarce knew what she feared. Death was casting over life that shadow which departs not when his visible presence is withdrawn, but leaves a cold, grey stain where it has fallen. Her next words were spoken almost without consciousness.

"*What will they* do with her?"

Enrique pointed to the sea, and walked away without speaking.

The girl sat down upon the threshold, and, burying her face upon her knees, tried to think. What was this Death of which she heard only in her prayers, and which she had seen only in her flowers? *They* faded and fell, losing all the brightness, and fragrance, and colour, which composed their life; but then she knew they would put forth fresh blossoms next year—the same, yet different—greeting every spring-time with a spring of their own. Would there be any change like this in Dame Pacheca? Would she lie awhile withered, and white, and helpless, and then rise up and come forth amongst them in new youth and vigour? Nay: those faint, far-off, well-nigh forgotten lessons of infancy, never since repeated or enforced, had surely taught her something different from this. She had been told of judgment after death. Here, then, was the distinction between flowers and human beings. The former died only to be born again; the latter died that they might be judged. Dame Pacheca was going to judgment. Ah, there was nothing terrible here! Little Cygnet thought on the Cross, with its pale, calm figure, before which she was wont to mumur her prayers; and the only ideas which she associated with it were those of power and protection. And when Dame Pacheca had been judged, would He suffer her to come back again? Or would He take her to some other world—the world of which Cygnet was always dreaming? Was there, indeed, *such a* place—a world full of flowers, and sunshine, and *dancing* waters, and happy creatures, where no harsh

word was ever spoken, and where the whole day, from dawn to moonlight, might be passed in wandering, dreaming, and playing, with no interruption, with no summons home, and with no need to hide oneself? There was nothing terrible in this either. Why, then, did Dame Pacheca look so terrified, and Juan so sad? and why was even Enrique, whom Cygnet believed in her heart to have no more soul than a root—why was even he a little pale and a little thoughtful? And why did the girl's own heart sink, and her blood run colder in her veins? She could but recur to her first question: there was some mystery here. What—oh, what is death?

Juan passed her. Dame Pacheca was asleep, he said; and he bade little Cygnet summon him, if she stirred or uttered a sound. He should be within call. Little Cygnet went in and sat on the step of the ladder where she could hear the sick woman's voice, and gaze out through the low, narrow archway upon the wild crests of the rocks, two of which cut off for her a triangular picture of the sea, calmed by distance, and silvered by a stream of sunshine from the bosom of a sable cloud.

She had not sat here many minutes when the voice of Dame Pacheca called her. She started up to fetch Juan; but the summons was repeated in a tone of such anguish that she could not disregard it; it seemed strangely near, too; and when she looked up, she saw the white, shaking figure of the sick woman leaning over the top of the ladder, whither she had dragged her failing limbs by a last convulsive effort.

"Cygnet! Here! Instantly! Do not go for Juan!"

The girl sprang to her side, and supported her back to her comfortless couch. She would have left her then, but could not escape the iron clasp which closed upon her wrists.

"Listen, Cygnet!" cried the dying woman, in a breathless, interrupted whisper. "I taught you your prayers. I did that. I was never cruel to you. And, remember, I taught you your prayers. Do you know how old you are? You will be thirteen in three months—do not forget—your birthday is the Second of October. And your name—hush! who is coming?"

"It is only the wind among the reeds: it rustles like footsteps," answered the awe-struck child.

Dame Pacheca had broken off suddenly with a look of terror; she now resumed, speaking in the same hoarse, hurried, gasping whisper, as if a portion of her life went with every syllable, and her final doom depended on the utterance of all that she had to say. Though she relaxed not for a moment the convulsive tightness with which she had clutched the arms of the child, her eyes were fixed all the time upon the entrance to the chamber, with a wild, straining, glassy stare, as though she saw or dreaded to see some fearful intruder upon their conference.

"Remember I taught you a prayer!" she began again. "And promise—hark!—promise to have masses said for my poor soul! Ah! you understand me not—but no matter! Remember, it is my last entreaty—masses for my soul—forget not the words! masses for my soul! Do *you* hear?"

The girl promised eagerly, though she knew not to

what she was binding herself. She would have said or done anything to chase away that awful look of dying anguish and terror. With a momentary expression of relief, the unhappy woman continued—

"Ah, you promise! And now, look here" (producing a small wooden box which she had hidden under the coverlet): "this is yours. Keep it. Take care of it. Hide it. Do not let Juan see it. He would kill you—do you hear?—he would kill you! Run away if you can. It is a sin that you should be here; it was sin, foul, terrible sin, when we took you. But I would not let him kill you. When I am gone—Our Lady have pity upon you. Remember what I say—escape if you can—you are not ours—your name is Nina—remember, Nina—never tell Juan that I told you! Escape if you can, and beg your way to the Convent at Gerona. Ah! how are you to escape? Ha!" breaking off with a scream of horror, "what was that?"

"Rain is falling," answered the trembling Nina; "and the drops plash upon the water like quick steps upon the sand. There is no one."

"Never tell Juan a word that I have said. He would kill you. Remember—oh! I have more to tell—come close—listen—ah, remember I taught you a prayer—and I made him spare your life—pray for me! Oh! it is dark, dark, dark!"

Her voice died away, and her spirit with it. She dropped Nina's hands, and made a feeble motion for her to depart. The child, as soon as she was released, ran wildly out of the house, and called for Juan, who came,

instantly; but it was too late. Ere his foot had reached the highest round of the ladder, that poor, guilty, trembling soul was gone.

On the evening of the following day the body of Dame Pacheca was cast into the sea. Nina, her nerves yet shivering, her senses yet bewildered, her heart yet chilled by the terrific interview of the day before, was sitting on a rock with her face covered by her hands, when Juan and Enrique lowered their melancholy burden. As the dull, heavy splash struck upon her ear, she started up with a thrill of amazement. It was the sound which had prefaced her strange dream nearly five years before! So perfect was the identity, that she withdrew her hands from her face and looked wildly about her, expecting to see the unforgotten scene enacted once more, and this time by daylight, and before her waking eyes. But she saw only the solitary grey tower, with the dark crag behind it, and the two silent figures climbing heavily up the face of the cliff, and the circles dying away upon the ruffled water below.

The box which the dying woman had given to Nina (whom we shall continue henceforth to call by her real name) contained a chain and crucifix of pure gold, the clasp ornamented with precious stones, and a long tress of auburn hair, which looked as though it might have been shorn from the head of the child herself, tied with a lace of silver. Nina gazed at them with wonder and curiosity, and carefully concealed them in her garments. For a long while her mind was constantly busy with the strange

new thoughts, which had been thus fearfully thrust into it, but, as there was nothing to feed the fire, it was impossible that it should continue to burn with its first intensity. The darkness of the mystery was so profound, that, after her thoughts had grouped in it till they were weary, there was nothing left for them but to go to sleep; a glimpse of light might have kept them awake and at work, but there was not even a glimpse. The hoarse, whispered words seemed constantly sounding in her ear with their breathless iteration—"Remember I taught you a prayer. Escape if you can. Do not tell Juan. He will kill you. It is dark, dark, dark!" But they were as fruitless in her life as they had been in Pacheca's death. She could do nothing. Escape was impossible. Further knowledge was beyond her reach. She could only repeat to herself again and again the new name which she was not allowed to reveal, and the mysterious words, "masses for my soul," and "Convent of Gerona," which were to her as the accents of some unknown tongue committed to memory, in the vain hope that one day an interpreter might come. And sometimes a chill shudder passed over her as she recalled the words, scarcely more intelligible, "Juan will kill you!" But her mind was too innocent, too ignorant, and too childish for this thought to prey upon it as a real and ceaseless terror. She had always feared Juan; always felt that there was danger in his presence, in his voice, in his look; and she feared him still, and avoided him as much as possible. But if there was any change in her feeling towards him, it was perhaps that she was a little less afraid than formerly. The less

of the only being on earth for whom he had ever entertained a feeling approaching to affection, the close communion into which he had been forced by that awful visitant who came to take her from him—these had shaken even his rocky nature, though they could not soften it. He had refused the agonizing supplications of her deathbed; the pleadings of her roused and trembling conscience; the last passionate entreaty of a life which had been, with all its crimes, entirely his own. But something like a sense of guilt had stolen upon him with the refusal; and Nina stood before him now as the faint reflection of the fears of the dead, and, perchance, a dim prophecy of terrors which might hereafter assail himself. It was a sort of atonement to let her live, to speak less roughly to her, to appease his wife's restless spirit in its appeals to him now, by treating her well. And so she was suffered to live on somewhat less chidden than before, if not more cared for.

It was nine months since the death of Dame Pacheca, and spring was come again. The winter had been unusually severe, and Juan had not left the island for more than a day at a time to fish. He now began to talk of an expedition, to take down and clean his mail-shirt and his huge battle-axe, and to mutter with Enrique, over the evening fire, about certain necessary preparations and arrangements. The boat had received some injury during the last excursion, and the repairs which it now required occupied both men during the daytime. Nina prepared the meals, mended the garments, and wandered about the rocks unnoticed as usual.

She was active and fearless as one of her own wild goats, and had, in the last few months, grown rapidly. It was her delight to scale those heights and explore those recesses among the island crags, which had been beyond the reach of her childish limbs and strength, and every day she added some new province to her undisputed domain. The rugged and precipitous forms of the rocks rendered her various enterprises both difficult and tedious; but they were all the more welcome on that account, as they afforded an exercise for her youthful ardour and energies, which she could obtain in no other manner. Her greatest enjoyment was to descend the face of the cliffs to sundry little nooks and niches of sand, miniature platforms, which the waters touched without covering, save when storms had lashed them into fury, and which till very lately she had been quite unable to reach. If she had been seen during one of these perilous experiments—her slender naked feet clinging to some mere ledge of the rock, her hands clasping some projection or root of seaweed, her lithe graceful figure bending as she dropped from point to point, her face, so beautiful, so sculptural in its form, so wild, nay, half-savage in its expression, but redeemed for humanity by the depth and dreamy unconscious sensibility of the wondrous eyes, and turned ever and anon over her bare shoulder, as she shook back her veil of bright locks, to see how far she had advanced upon her giddy course, till finally, with a bound like a deer, she alighted on the sand, and cast herself down as if upon a royal couch to gaze triumphantly over the waters—if she had been seen at such times she might well have been taken

for those mermaidens of more than mortal beauty, who lie in wait for the unwary mariner, and lure him to his destruction. Nay, when, as sometimes happened, she unloosed the string which confined her abundant tresses, and, having washed them in the sea, shook them over her whole person like a veil of amber gauze glittering with pearls, the resemblance was complete. But there was no mariner to see her, whether in fear or in admiration. The terrible name of Suniario, Lord of Urgel, and the fierce, repulsive bearing of Juan himself, had effectually relieved him from all visitors from the land; while the beacon taught those who passed by at sea to keep their distance. The strange, lovely child was growing up in a solitude as unbroken as that of the diamond which brightens the unknown depths of the earth.

Several of the tiny coves of which we have spoken were still unvisited, and to one of these, peculiarly inviting and peculiarly inaccessible, she determined to descend one fair spring evening. It was a semicircular nest, some six feet across, and it lay in the arms of the dark cliff, which projected far on both sides, and sank in front through an unfathomable depth of waters, and rose above, frowningly indeed, but with a surface so broken and uneven that Nina felt certain she could obtain a footing. It looked like a couch on the battlement of some submarine castle made ready for the repose of the queen of the sea. A thin deposit of sand rendered it smooth, and a cluster of bright sea-pinks, tufting the edge, made the entire picture too tempting to be resisted. Nina swung herself over the crest of the cliff, and began to descend with her

wonted agility; but slowly, for the way was dangerous and unknown. Several times during her progress she had to return from the edge of some impassable precipice, at the imminent risk of her life, and try another path. At length, however, she reached, weary and breathless, a ledge from which it was possible to drop to the haven below, and, losing her grasp, was down in an instant. On her passage she had scared a sea-bird from a hole in the cliff, and, on looking into the place which it left, to her infinite delight she discovered a nest with the young not yet ready to fly. One of these little creatures was instantly transferred from the nest to her bosom, where she strove to cover it with her scanty garment, and wrap it about with her luxuriant tresses, to reconcile it to the change. It struggled at first, but after a while lay still in terror, and Nina, still keeping it in her bosom, sought to soothe it by caresses.

"I will take you home," she said, as she sat on the edge of the rock, her white feet hanging over so as to touch the water, her hands busied in winding her shining curls about the panting bird—"I will take you home, swift and wild one with restless eyes: you shall be mine, and you shall learn to know me; you shall fly round my head when I sit on the threshold, and flap your moon-edged wings in the daylight, and sue to me for food. Be still, child of the sea and of my heart! you are mine."

Was that the faint cry of the mother-bird asking for her young one? Was it an echo over the waters? Hush!—hark!—listen!—it is a human voice! Softly, and with a stifled sound, from the further side of the crag against

which Nina leaned her cheek, the following words became audible. They were chanted to a low, solemn strain, and seemed to come out of the depths of the rock. Nina strained every nerve to listen :—

Star that sinkest through the sea,
  Wilt thou, in some world below,
Rise again, as bright and free
  As thou shinest on me now?

Has the quenching wave a power
  Over all thy locks of flame?
Canst thou furl them as a flower
  Shuts and opens, still the same?

Framed in yonder wall of rock,
  The poor limit of my sky,
Seems thy prison but to mock
  Thy majestic liberty!

With thy stately step and slow,
  Thou hast cross'd the gloomy space—
Were I free to come and go,
  Mine would be a swifter pace!

Now thy little crown of light
  Rests a moment on the verge;
Take me on thy downward flight,
  To the darkness and the surge!

Take me from this tomb, where lie
  All my fruitless youth and hope;
Dreams that beat their wings and die,
  Chafing bars that never ope!

Take me hence! But thou art gone!
  Vacant sky and dreary main
Murmur back, "Alone! Alone!"
  Murmur back, "In vain! In vain!"

If it be remembered that Nina had never heard a note of music in her life, and that she possessed the finest susceptibility of a delicate organization and the quick current of southern blood in unworn freshness, it may be possible to conceive the feelings which she now experienced. The rich and mellow though subdued tones—the calm, measured melody—the rhythm of the words as they slowly rose and fell to the music, alternately stimulating and satisfying the ear—the peculiar sensation which a fine and simple tune always produces, that thus it must be and not otherwise, so that, although we are hearing it for the first time, we walk hand-in-hand with it as with an old friend, and seem to anticipate every step—all these produced in her a sensation of enchantment so absorbing that there was no room either for astonishment or for fear. With her cheek against the rock, her hands on her bosom, her breath suppressed, her every limb thrilling and trembling, she listened in a trance of delight, too vague and too intense for conscious thought or perception.

When the wonderful strain ceased, and her excited senses were unable to catch the faintest echo from which they might work out its imaginary repetition, she became pale, she sighed deeply again and again; and at length an abundant flow of tears, which seemed as though they never would cease, relieved her, and prevented her from falling into a state of actual insensibility. She sat long there, weeping and subdued, ere she became capable of reflecting upon the cause of her emotion. But when thought once awoke, it could not rest again. Whence and what were these mysterious sounds? The wildest

conjectures poured upon her mind so rapidly, that she felt faint and dizzy. Was it a human being, or a spirit of the waters, or an angel from the skies? Or had the wind the faculty of weaving such marvellous syllables among the hollows of the rocks? Or was it the voice of a star fallen from its sphere, and bound by some wondrous force to the earth, pleading wistfully with its happier brethren? She could grasp no definite thought, save one of rapture and longing, blended with a certain gentle awe that was not fear; and, obeying this impulse, she stretched herself as far as she could round the rock from which the sounds had proceeded, and called aloud, hoping for an answer. But no answer came. Either the waters drowned her voice, or the hard wind bore it backward, or the mysterious utterer of that strain was one who brooked not the address of a mortal. She drew back disappointed; when, suddenly, a new idea occurred to her. Very softly, with a timid and uncertain voice, like the movements of one who walks blindfold and fears to fall, and knows not where he is going, she began to imitate the sounds to which she had just listened. Her head was bent, her fingers pressed against her brow, her eyes fixed dreamily on one spot in the water, and filled with a wistful, seeking expression, which kindled ever more and more into brightness as the sound which she produced satisfied the expecting ear. As she breathed the last note, she rose involuntarily to her feet, lifted her glowing face, spread forth her arms as though she could have embraced the universe, and poured forth from her very heart a torrent of bright, full, fearless melody, such as the nightingale utters when her joy is

highest. With every note the rapture and inspiration in her eyes deepened; and with the last, she fell on her knees, dropped her face upon her hands, and murmured, with an unreasoning, yet, oh! most natural impulse, the words—

"Thanks! Thanks! Thanks!"

Nina had no time to discover that her song had found a listener as full of wonder, curiosity, and hope, as she had herself been only the moment before. A recollection of the manner in which she had always been taught to subdue her voice to the lowest whisper darted into her mind, and, with the fear of being overheard, came the scarcely less terrific thought that the sun had set, and the hour for Juan's evening meal was come, if not past. She sprang to her feet, scaled the cliff like a young chamois, and, panting for breath, had reached the fireside and spread the board just as he entered—happily for her, a little later than usual.

No sleep visited her bed that night. Indeed, she was too restlessly and wildly awake to lie down; and as she dared not go out into the moonlight, lest Juan or Enrique should be roused, she spent some hours kneeling upon the pillow of her couch, and leaning her forehead against the loophole above, which was barely large enough to frame her face like a picture, and to let in the cool night-wind upon it. By morning her thoughts were in some measure arranged, and her resolution formed. To hide this glorious power, which had been thus suddenly revealed or imparted to her, with the most jealous care till Juan and Enrique were gone on their expedition, and then to make

every rock and recess of the island vocal with her strains; this was her first idea. Oh, how she longed for the days of enforced silence to be over! Her second project was to discover the utterer of the magic sounds which had taught her such wonders. This, too, she wisely deferred till after Juan's departure, when she should be secure from interruption and discovery, and when she determined to descend the island cliff on that more precipitous side towards the sea, which she had not hitherto attempted; a descent which, if she could achieve it, would conduct her to the other side of the crag from which the voice had proceeded. Restraining her impatience, therefore, with the utmost difficulty, and only enabled to restrain it by her intense fear of disappointment, she waited through the next fortnight, wandering about like an unquiet spirit, taking no pleasure in her accustomed sports, and fearing or fancying an unusual vigilance on the part of her stern master, which prevented her from once venturing to renew her visit to the place where she had obtained her first glimpse of the mystery.

IV.

It was early morning, and Nina had helped Juan and Enrique to carry down to the boat the stores necessary for their voyage, and now stood with the rope in her hand, awaiting the signal to cast it loose. The two men, who had returned to the tower after packing the boat, and had bade her wait for them, soon reappeared, descending the rock to the place where she was stationed. Nina's heart bounded and fluttered against her hand as feverishly as her

own poor little prisoner-bird; she had detected that there was some hesitation about leaving her alone on the island, and though she believed the final decision was that it might safely be done, she dreaded some fatal change at the last moment. The words of Juan, as they drew near, did not reassure her.

"It is not the fear of escape," said he; "that is impossible, I know. But if any one should come to the island?"

"Pshaw!" replied Enrique; "there has been no visitant for five years, and wherefore should one seek us now? When they see the beacon light they will suppose you still here. Besides, she can be tutored."

They paused, and spoke together in whispers for some time, and then, bidding Nina fasten the boat once more and come to them, they proceeded to give her their parting instructions. She was told that her life depended on her not being discovered; that if any stranger should come to the island and find her there, she would infallibly be thrown into the sea; that in case of the arrival of any visitor, therefore, she must hide in one of her nooks among the rocks, and on no account venture forth till he should have departed; and, in order to secure her from being compelled to violate his command, Juan showed her where he had hidden a small barrel of meal in a crevice of the cliff, and directed her, if, by any extraordinary chance, strangers should take up their abode on the islet, to remain hidden by day, and come forth at night to fetch her necessary food. He gave her also a hand-net for fishing, and reminded her that she could, under any circumstances,

obtain drinking water from the stream. He charged her, if nothing more than ordinary occurred, to light the beacon each night, and wait patiently for his return. He did not say how long he should be absent; but she knew that he had taken provisions for a month.

And now the rope is cast off, and the boat is dancing and rocking upon the waters. Now it crests the wave, and now dips behind it. Now it is a mere speck in the distance; and now it is invisible. And Nina? She is still sitting upon the rock where she sat down to watch the boat till it should be out of sight. She is fairly powerless at first; crushed by the weight of too much liberty. In a few moments, however, she starts up, and begins her work. She cannot sing; her heart is still trembling; her breath is short; her nerves are fevered: there must be repose before music, and she feels that it is now impossible. So she descends the cliff as far from the land side of the islet as she can; and then begins her perilous attempt to make her way quite round that face of it which is towards the sea.

She proceeded for some time, slowly and with difficulty, venturing many a leap, which none save herself would have risked, but not encountering any actual check. At last she reached a barrier which was quite impassable. In vain she ascended and descended; now clinging to the giddiest height—now wading knee-deep, in the hope of finding a foothpath under the water: she was baffled at all points, and at last compelled to relinquish the attempt. She struck the palms of her hands together with an emotion of anger; and by the incautious movement, missed

her footing, and was well-nigh precipitated into the sea from an elevation of fifty feet. Had it not been for an immense knot of seaweed, hanging above her like a cluster of snakes, which she clutched eagerly with both hands, she must have fallen.

As she regained her position by the help of the same friendly weed, passing her hands higher and higher along its streamers towards the roots, in order to obtain a firmer hold, she found that it grew, not on the surface of the cliff, but just within a hollow which had been hidden from her by the folds of a great mass of marine tapestry. Grasping the root with one hand, she stretched the other as far forward as she could, within the hollow, and found no boundary. In another moment she was within it herself, on her knees. It was just high enough to admit her in that position, and, creeping cautiously onwards, she endeavoured to ascertain the extent of the cavern which she had thus unexpectedly discovered. Her hope was that it might perforate the crag which she had been unable to cross, and that she should issue from the natural tunnel on the other side.

Alas! no. Her hands are already touching the inner extremity of the cave, and there is no further passage! But stay! As she feels impatiently along the surface of the natural wall, she discovers a place where a passage has evidently been, now filled up with sand and loose stones.

Nina paused a moment in wonder. This was human work, and she was at once fascinated and alarmed by the idea that some one had been here before her. It was quite dark; but she ascertained, by feeling, that the space

was barred by a fragment of rock too large and heavy for her to move. As, however, its shape was nearly round, while that of the aperture into which it had been fitted approached a square, there were four interstices, and these had been filled up with a kind of rubble, composed of smaller stones and sand, which she could easily break away. Indeed, time had already partially done the work of destruction for her, and she thought that, at one of the corners, the space, when cleared, would be large enough to admit the passage of her slender body. Eagerly, but cautiously, she advanced her head, and, finding no difficulty thus far, attempted to creep through. There was barely room, but she achieved it.

She found herself in a cavern, running almost at right angles to that through which she had already passed. It was narrow, but high enough to allow her to stand erect. It extended both upwards and downwards from the archway by which she had entered, floor and roof sloping rather steeply. She could not see either extremity; but, looking along the upward slope, she was aware of a glimmer of light, and in that direction, accordingly, she advanced. Her eyes were now so far accustomed to the darkness that she could faintly discern the outlines of the rock, so that she had no fear of striking her head against unseen projections, or falling into unsuspected holes. She walked or rather climbed on, then, without fear, though slowly and carefully, starting occasionally, as the only sound of the cavern solitude, the sudden plash of a single heavy drop of water, broke upon her ear, and suggested the idea of an invisible gnome, clapping his hands in malignant triumph, at

this intrusion of the mortal who would shortly pay dear for having advanced so far into his secret fastness.

She reached the upper extremity of the cavern, and found, to her amazement, that it was closed by a strong grating, through which the light came from a chamber beyond. This chamber was of human building, scantily furnished, and lighted by one small loophole window. At first, Nina thought it was wholly unknown to her; but she soon perceived a cloak and hat of Juan's hanging against the wall, and knew, then, that she had returned to the tower, and that this was the inner apartment which she had never been permitted to enter. The door in the wall opposite the grating corresponding in size and shape with that whose bars and bolts she had often inquisitively contemplated from the other side, confirmed the supposition.

It is always a strange feeling when, in some unfamiliar place, after many turnings and windings, by which we have lost all consciousness of the actual direction in which we are proceeding, we find ourselves, on a sudden, in close neighbourhood and full view of the well-remembered spot from which we started. Few fail to experience a sense of unreality, as though the scene were a vision, and would pass away in a moment, followed by an odd, uncomfortable idea of inevitable necessity, as though hither we must be brought, and could not help ourselves, and could not get away if we would. It was, perhaps, some feeling of this sort, in conjunction with her habitual fear of all symptoms of Juan's presence, which caused Nina to turn, after a single glance into the room, and hurriedly retrace her steps, as if in flight. Her first thought was to

escape by the way by which she had entered, and explore the cavern no further; but, as she advanced, her nerves became calmer, and she resolved to penetrate to the other extremity.

She was, in fact, as has been already perceived, in the hermit's passage. She had entered it by a small supplementary outlet, which had been filled up, for greater convenience and safety, by some former tenant of the island, and the existence of which Juan had never discovered. Nina had not, however, that knowledge of her own position which we possess, for she had never suspected the existence of the cavern itself. She therefore proceeded along her downward course without an idea whither it was carrying her; and having at length reached the second grating, and become sensible of a pale unwholesome light beyond, she applied her face to the bars, and looked eagerly through.

She beheld an irregular rocky chamber, such as we have formerly described, having a single small aperture towards the sea, through which light and air were admitted. It was now noon; and the southern sunbeams, entering more fully and directly than at any other hour of the day, enabled her to see the interior of the cavity distinctly. It was no vision, then—it was no fancy of the bewildered sight—she could not be mistaken—it was the outline of a human figure! The rays fell upon the shoulder, and touched into light a mass of dark hair upon the brow. It was a man, sitting on the floor of the cabin with his face bowed upon his knees!

For her life, Nina could not have suppressed the excla-

mation which sprang to her lips. Soft as it was, it smote upon the ear of the lonely dweller in the rock as a trumpet-blast. It was the first human voice he had heard for many months. He stood up and confronted her, drawing a little aside, that his modicum of light might stream unbroken upon her face. He did not approach her; and the heavy clank of a chain, as he rose to his feet, afforded a sufficient reason for his not doing so. The links were massy and strong; they passed round his waist, and were riveted to the rock beneath which he had been sitting. The face which he lifted to Nina's wondering gaze was as colourless as though it had been cut in ivory; even the lips had scarcely a hue of red; and this unnatural pallor, set off and framed by masses of black, tangled hair, and animated by eyes of peculiar melancholy brightness, presented, though at noon day, the precise effect of tint, of shadow, and of contrast, which moonlight produces upon faces in general. Yet, changed though it was by this spectral whiteness, there was no mistaking the identity of the countenance which Nina had seen long ago in her unforgotten dream. As the truth flashed upon her that this fancied dream was a reality, and that the unhappy being before her had passed all these years—these wild, free, sunshiny years, which had brought her from infancy to girlhood—chained and solitary—entombed beneath the very ground over which her ethereal feet had danced away the hours, she pressed her hands upon her throbbing heart, and could not restrain a cry of amazement and pity.

But if her sensations were bewildering, it would be impossible to portray those of him on whom she gazed.

The sudden apparition of that lovely, living, glowing face, pressed against the bars of his prison, looking like an incarnation of hope, joy, and liberty, could not have seemed stranger had it been on the pillow of a death-bed beside the cold, livid features of which the soul was even then taking leave; and the contrast could scarcely have been greater—for, truly, life and death stood here face to face. His first thought—natural to those old twilight days, when the boundary between the visible and invisible world either was, or was believed to be, less strongly marked, more frequently overstepped than at present—was that some inhabitant of Paradise, touched by the sorrows of his long and lonely captivity, had descended to console him. Folding his arms, therefore, upon his breast, and dropping upon his knees, he addressed her with deep reverence, and with a voice which trembled at its own unwonted sound.

"Speak, kind messenger! I listen. What would you with me?"

The eager, hurried, girlish accents of Nina's answer undeceived him in a moment. They were unmistakably human.

"All these years!" exclaimed she; "have you been here all these years? Ever since I saw you brought in at night with your forehead bleeding? Oh! why was this? Why are you kept here? Is it for a punishment? Have you been very wicked? Oh! how have you been able to live?"

The prisoner advanced as far as his chain would suffer him, and looked at her earnestly. The expression of his face was so gentle and so noble, that Nina, though she

understood it not, received in that moment a new idea of humanity. She was sensible only of a vehement, irresistible impulse to help him, and she instantly expressed it.

"*Must* you stay here? Cannot I set you free? Oh! cannot I help you?" springing up and down in her childish eagerness, and shaking the bars of the grating with all her strength. Hope—the first glimmer of hope after so long a darkness—conquered wonder and curiosity and all other emotions in the prisoner's breast. He clasped his hands and exclaimed, "Bring me any weapon with which I can sever this chain, and I am free without help."

Nina was gone in an instant. It seemed hours till she returned. She came at last, having slung round her neck, in order that it might not impede her on her difficult way, the hatchet which Juan used for hewing the beacon-wood. Thrusting it between the bars, she endeavoured to throw it within the reach of the unknown. It touched the floor and rolled over. Ah! it is beyond his grasp!—he kneels —he stretches out his arm—he has touched it—in vain! He can but reach it with his finger-tips. He looked up at her without speaking, and she flung him a sheathed dagger which she had taken from the wall of the tower. The weapon was so small that she could easily poise and throw it, and he caught it in his hand. With this he was able to move the axe, and in less than a minute he had it in his grasp, and breathlessly, scarcely pausing to take aim, had struck one stroke upon the rock to which his chain was riveted. Nina watched his motions with inconceivable eagerness. She saw him pause after that one stroke, drop the axe, and lift up his eyes and hands with an emotion

which she could not fathom. Ah! how often by night, by day, awake, asleep, had his fancy brought this moment before him, mocking him with a representation of the very action which he was now accomplishing, and then leaving him to recognize its impossibility with faint and weary sighs! How often had his eyes ached with gazing upon those inexorable links—gazing with an open intensity which seemed as though it would blind them—without hope, almost without perception, but still gazing on—till they lost the power of seeing what they looked upon; and he stretched out his hand to ascertain whether the loathsome chain was indeed still there! And now he can scarcely believe that fancy is not cheating him again. But no; though the stroke be tremulous and the grasp uncertain, they are real. That sound was the music of which he has dreamed so often—the sound of his chains breaking! One brief moment of bewildered thankfulness, and he renews his strokes. His arm has lost somewhat of its force during these wasting years; no matter, he puts his *soul* into it! Again; will the rivet never yield? Ah! it is giving way! Once more, and the loosened chain falls with a clashing noise upon the floor of the dungeon, and Nina clasps her hands, and shouts her joy louder than she has ever shouted yet in her life.

The prisoner's first movement was to fall upon his knees, and pour forth, aloud, expressions of thankfulness, and love, and joy, so fervent, that his wondering visitor could not conceive to whom they were addressed. His next act was to approach the grating, and, bidding her withdraw beyond the reach of his blows, he attacked it

with such a passion of energy that he soon forced it from its fastenings, and was able to drag it away, detaching, as he did so, many splinters of the rock, which his rapid axe had split and shivered on all sides. He paused a moment to take breath, and Nina, running forward, bounded through the now open doorway, to the cavern floor, came swiftly to his side, and put her little hand in his.

"You will not harm me?" she said, looking up, with an expression half of confidence, half of fear.

"Harm thee, my lovely child!" cried he, clasping his arms about her slight figure, and kissing her innocent forehead with inexpressible tenderness; "God Himself has sent thee hither to save me, and I would sooner see yon hateful chain riveted once more to the wall, not to be broken, than suffer any harm to come near thee, which my life could ward away! Lead me, now, I beseech thee —lead me up to the light and the air—yet, stay—where is that false traitor, Juan of Ripol? art thou safe from him when he learns what thou hast done?"

Nina had no voice to answer him. She trembled, and a thrill shot through her heart. Poor child! It was the first caress she had ever received; the first word of affection she had ever heard. She was like one suddenly transported from polar regions to the noon of the tropics, who faints and is ready to die from the mere abundance and luxury of the new life thrust upon him. She needed to be acclimatized.

She led the way in silence till he earnestly repeated his question; and then she explained in a few words how it really was. Relieved from this fear, which had both

checked his emotions and given them a definite shape, the prisoner staggered after her in a dream of delight. He had often to pause and rest, for the unwonted exertion was too much for his limbs, enfeebled by long confinement and inaction; but he was in the bloom of youth and strength, and it is difficult to over-estimate the elasticity of the human constitution during that bright time of life. It was, however, impossible for him to scale the cliff where Nina had ascended it. He sat down in the entrance of the cavern, and, by the help of the dagger and some loose stones, succeeded, after considerable labour, in detaching from his waist the heavy chain which still impeded his steps. Then, plunging into the water, he half swam, half waded round to the place where the boat generally landed, and whence the inland path was comparatively easy; and Nina had not long completed her rapid ascent, ere she saw him come slowly over the edge of the cliff and enter the meadow before the tower. His head was dizzy and his step uncertain; tears of joy rolled down his cheeks, and broken expressions of exultation and thankfulness escaped from his lips. He cast himself on the ground near Nina, plucked a handful of grass, kissed it passionately, and wept like a child. It was some time ere he recovered sufficiently to become conscious of the presence of the strange, beautiful being, who, crouching upon the earth at a little distance, watched him with eyes as shy and wild as those of the gazelle. When he perceived her, however, he stretched out his hand, and, taking her by the slender wrist, drew her gently to him.

"You wonder at me, fair child!" said he. "Can you

dream what it is to see no more of the benignant sunshine for five long years than I have seen through yonder narrow loophole above the desolate, groaning, ceaseless waters? To be cooped up and tethered like a wild beast, and to feel heart, hope, sense, soul, dying daily out of you, till you were, indeed, well-nigh on a level with the beasts that perish? By my faith, the knighthood comes back upon my spirit like the kindling of a long-extinguished taper; and I begin now first to discover how deep was the darkness into which I had fallen! O for my good steed and trusty sword!"

Nina leaned forward, and rested her clasped hands on his knee, looking up into his eyes—

"Why were you put into that dreadful place?" asked she. "What had you done?"

"My child," replied the knight, "Juan of Ripol is an evil man; and, I fear me, he serves one worse than himself. But of that I know not certainly, and will not speak. Listen, and understand me if you can; for, in truth, those bright, mysterious eyes of yours look as though they had communed with other than human beings so long, that human language can scarce be intelligible to them. I served a good and noble master, who is long since dead; but ere he died, he took my hands in his thus" (and the knight separated Nina's hands and took one in each of his own), "and he looked gravely in my face as I look now in yours—I was but a boy then—and told me a great secret. He made me promise, upon the holy Gospel, that I would never reveal what he had told me; and I said I would die sooner. Then I went

away into other lands and became a knight; and when I returned, my good master was dead. And this Juan of Ripol came upon me by night, and took me captive; and when he could not make me tell him the secret which I had sworn to keep, he shut me up in yonder hateful cell, and vowed that I should remain there till I yielded. He would have slain me, but that there lived none, save myself, who could reveal to him that which he sought to know. He did slay one far nobler than I am."

With the last words the knight's voice faltered, and he withdrew his hand from Nina's, and placed it over his eyes.

"And you have been there all these years!" murmured Nina, pointing in the direction of the cavern, and taking up her first words, like the burden of some plaintive ballad; "all these bright, living years!—all these weary, cold, dark, wasting, lonely years!" (at each epithet her eyes distended with a new expression of wonder and pity, almost as though she had two hearts, and the one were suggesting to the other ideas too painful for it to bear). "Oh, how strong you must be! I know nothing else—" and she paused again, as her thoughts rapidly traversed their small sphere of experience, and suggested to her how soon a bird, a flower, or one of her four-footed favourites would have drooped and died in that hopeless solitude—"I know nothing else that could have lived."

"Can you tell what kept me alive?" asked he, looking fixedly at her.

"I heard you once speaking to your star," replied Nina; "was it that?"

"It was a star within," replied he, smiling. "Our Father which is in heaven" (he pointed upwards) "was tender with me, and never suffered hope to die. If I had yielded, if I had consented to break my faith and do that deed of baseness, I might have been free at any moment. So I felt that it was mine own power that kept me prisoner, and was patient."

He looked at her with eyes so clear, steadfast, and shining, that they seemed to go at once to her soul, and kindle in it a light like their own. She *caught* the feeling which she comprehended not—it is the way in which every fresh heart first receives the love of virtue, about which it learns afterwards to reason, when, alas! too often the love has waxed cold—and answered him—her uplifted face reflecting the radiance of his—"I could do the same!"

"By God's help," replied he, cheerfully, "we can all keep our consciences pure, or cleanse them, if, unhappily, a stain has fallen on them. And on you, poor, little tender flower, may He never lay a burden that would crush you! But now tell me; know you any means whereby I can leave this islet? I must be away ere Juan returns."

The discussion which followed did not conduct them to a very satisfactory issue. There was no boat on the island, and it would have been rash in the extreme to attempt escape by wading to the shore, for the fishermen who inhabited it lived in deadly fear of the Count of Urgel and his fierce servitor Juan, and would not fail to intercept and detain the fugitive. Our knight, however, knew the

coast well; and he told Nina, that some twenty miles westward there lay a little creek, running far inland, and terminating in a cavern lofty enough to allow the entrance of a boat. Near this spot, in former days, dwelt a family well known to him, who would gladly receive him and assist him on his way. Supposing them to be no longer there, he was so familiar with the country that he felt no doubt of being able to effect a landing unperceived, and of making his way to a certain city, which he did not name to Nina, only telling her that there he should be in safety. The manner in which he proposed to make himself master of a boat was somewhat more hazardous; nor could he explain it without a sickness of heart, lest it should be but the prelude to a new captivity. He resolved to remain on the island during the ensuing month, keeping strict watch, and prepared to take refuge in some safe retreat among the crags, so soon as Juan's boat should appear in sight. Here he could lie concealed while a landing was effected; and when Juan and Enrique had ascended to the tower, whence the landing-place was not visible, he proposed to issue from his lurking-place, to take possession of the boat, and to depart without a moment's delay. Even if he should be discovered as soon as he started, he could not be overtaken, as there would be no means of pursuit; and before Juan could communicate with the shore he would be far on his way. His only fear was lest he should be discovered before starting, and this he hoped to render impossible by certain precautions. He determined to pass his days among the rocks, near the landing-place, whence a great

extent of sea on that side of the island was visible, and where he could conceal himself in an instant; while to avoid the danger which would attend upon Juan's arrival during the hours of darkness, he might descend at night into the passage leading to his former prison, replacing the grating behind him so as to prevent the risk of detection, and commanding a means of retreat at any moment through the outlet by which Nina had entered. The danger was nearly equal in the two cases; by day there was, of course, a greater likelihood of immediate discovery; but, on the other hand, by night, there was the chance of his not becoming aware of Juan's arrival as soon as it took place. Every minute of delay must, of course, increase the probability that he would descend to visit his prisoner; and in this case, the knight, lying perdu in the cavern, must trust to the issue of a personal struggle, the noise of which would, probably, summon Enrique and any others who might have accompanied him to the island, to assist Juan in once more securing his captive.

The knight's fear that Nina's share in his escape might be discovered, and that she would be punished, or in any way maltreated on his account, was relieved as soon as he expressed it, by her very simple and unexpected assurance that she meant to accompany him. He was startled; for though anxious to save so young and so beautiful a creature from the dreary prospect of life just opening before her, he believed her to be Juan's daughter, and doubted both his right to remove her, and his power to secure her when removed. She, however, in her new confidence, which seemed a natural instinct awakened by the only

human being she had ever beheld on whom it might safely fix, told him the history of Dame Pacheca, and showed him the crucifix and the tress of hair. A sudden and amazing light broke upon him in this recital, and as its result was a complete revelation of her position and of his own, it may be well to explain both in a few words, and without further delay.

V

In the year 912, Miro,* Count of Barcelona, succeeded Wifredo, surnamed the Warlike. The independence of Barcelona, formerly a fief of France, had been achieved by the heroic Wifredo; and he transmitted his dominions to his son, not as a fief, but as a kingdom. Miro reigned sixteen years; and the fact that France did not, during his sway, attempt to recover her supremacy, may be attributed partly to the internal dissensions which ravaged that country, but more, perhaps, to a circumstance not so generally known. Miro was brother-in-arms to the great Hugh le Blanc, son of the reigning Duke of France, and after the death of his father, disposer of the Crown itself, which he bestowed, upheld, or opposed at his own good pleasure. The alliance of this magnificent warrior secured the liberties of Barcelona; and when Miro died, Hugh le Blanc made solemn oath that he would see the last will and testament of his friend executed in every particular. As crowns were in those days disposed of by

* Chronicles are silent both concerning the reign of Miro and the first twenty-five years which followed it. It is hoped that this grievous gap in history is here in some measure filled up.

will, as such dispositions were almost invariably disputed, and as, according to the fashion of the times, blows generally preceded words, this was an office of no light moment. A difficulty occurred at once. Miro had been twice married. By his first wife, whom he passionately loved, he left issue, one daughter aged six years; by his second marriage, which was unhappy, he had three sons, the youngest of whom was born scarcely a week before the decease of his father. Miro left the sovereignty of Barcelona to his daughter, and placed her in the guardianship of Hugh le Blanc, charging him to provide her with a husband as soon as she should attain a marriageable age. To his sons he left the lordships of Rousillon and Cerdaña, and appointed his brother, Suniario, Count of Urgel, their guardian, and administrator of the affairs of the kingdom till the young countess should be capable of assuming her rights. When, however, Hugh le Blanc —who had been deeply occupied with his own affairs during the two years which preceded Miro's death, and had held no intercourse with his friend since, at the commencement of that period, he delivered his will to his keeping—demanded the person of the infant countess that she might be educated with his own children, a dark story was told him. It seemed that Miro had suffered from fits of insanity or imbecility, produced by an early wound in the temple; and that one of these, supervening soon after the completion of his will, had lasted till his death. His brother Suniario had assumed the reins of government; and he now informed the duke that the little Countess Nina, always a frail and delicate child, died

more than a year before her father, but that the event had been concealed from him, lest his grief should increase his malady. She had been placed, by Miro's directions, in the charge of a careful nurse, and conveyed to the Pyrenees in the hope that the mountain air might invigorate her feeble constitution; it was, therefore, easy to persuade him, whenever he remembered and asked for her, that she was not yet sufficiently recovered to return to him. Hugh le Blanc made a journey to Barcelona to relieve himself from the responsibility of his vow; saw the nurse, Dame Pacheca, received from her lips a confirmation of Suniario's account, and returned to Paris, satisfied that he had performed his duty to his deceased friend, and leaving Suniario undisturbed in his regency.

It is superfluous to inform the reader that he had been imposed upon by a false history. Suniario, ambitious, unscrupulous, and crafty, desiring to retain the substance if not the name of his authority as long as possible, had not failed to perceive that the accession of Nina to her inheritance would be fatal to his wishes. In the first place, she was withdrawn from his governance, and placed in the hands of a man whose power he feared and whose friendship he distrusted; in the second place, her husband, selected as soon as she became marriageable by this doubtful ally, would step, as a matter of course, into Suniario's place, and leave him to retire ignominiously to his petty lordship of Urgel. But if Nina could be removed, his way was plain before him.

Twelve or fourteen years of independent government, in the name of his infant nephew, were secure; and it

would be strange, indeed, if he could not mould the boy, of whose person and education he had exclusive charge, into such submission to his will, during this period, that the resignation of the regency, when it did occur, would be rather nominal than real. He took advantage, therefore, of Miro's failing intellects, placed the little Nina in the hands of a creature of his own on the pretext of care for her health, and gave Juan of Ripol a private intimation that the ailment of his wife's helpless charge was to terminate fatally in due course of time. Juan had no scruple in promising obedience, and no intention to break his promise; but the natural pity of his wife, the last grace which a woman loses, interfered to delay, and, finally to prevent the performance of it. For Pacheca he entertained, as we have already intimated, the nearest approach to affection of which his nature was capable; and he was, moreover, influenced in yielding to her entreaties by the desire of possessing a hold over his master in crime, which might stand him in good stead if anything should ever disturb their unholy alliance. The unconscious child was, therefore, suffered to live on, under a sentence of death which might be executed at any moment if Juan's interest or brutality demanded it; and Pacheca, whose sluggish but uneasy conscience had admitted a vague conviction that Nina's life was a barrier between her and the judgment which she had ample reason to dread, guarded it in the best manner she could, by making it neither conspicuous nor dangerous. Remorse preyed upon the unhappy woman's mind as death approached; and in a paroxysm of fear she confided to Nina those few particulars which we have already set

down, fancying that she might thus erase the terrible account against her; and unconscious, in her agony and her terror, how much she had left unsaid, and how useless might be the little which she had revealed.

To Suniario, of course, the death of Nina had been reported; and Juan continued high in his favour, executing for him, from time to time, many dark commissions which could not well have been entrusted to any one else. It was such a commission which caused his removal to the islet of San Pablo, and which we must now explain.

When Hugh le Blanc was satisfied, there remained only one observer dreaded by Suniario, and he was far away, engaged on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This was a certain knight, named Alvar the True, of great reputation, both for wisdom and bravery, who had been in early life the associate in arms of Miro and of Hugh; and who, from an incident of those days, which we need not now record, was well acquainted with the real character of Suniario, and had long treated him with a contemptuous distrust which awakened his bitterest resentment. Alvar had gone to the Holy Land, and there fallen into the hands of the infidels; he had been long detained in captivity, but there were rumours of his release and return. He was a kind of Cid in those times; poor in worldly riches, but exercising a boundless sway over men's minds by the greatness of his exploits and the purity of his honour. He had one son who, having been brought up in Miro's household till he attained the age of fourteen or fifteen, was then presented by Miro to Hugh le Blanc, who took charge of his fortunes out of respect to his father's name, taught

him the practical duties of a soldier, and accustomed him to measure his life by the chivalrous standard which Charlemagne had bequeathed to all such as were capable of receiving it. This boy, who inherited his father's noble and simple character, had been high in Miro's affections, and constantly about his person. When he was about to leave Barcelona for the Court of Paris, the monarch took him aside, and imparted to him in confidence that he had inherited from Wifredo the Warlike a great treasure of jewels and gold, the fruit of many encounters with the Saracen. This treasure—the existence of which was only known to Suniario and himself—was buried beneath the floor of one of the palace chambers, and assigned to Nina as a part of her inheritance. But Miro had lately learned to distrust his brother; and he, therefore, removed the precious deposit secretly, and concealed it elsewhere. To the young Alvar, and to him only, he imparted the place of its present concealment, and made him swear to keep the secret till the day of Nina's marriage should arrive. He had a hereditary confidence in the boy, and thought his secret far safer with him in the Court of France than with any other in that of Barcelona; and he was right, for Alvar endured more than death rather than betray it.

The rage of Suniario when he found the treasures gone, and learned from the will so often alluded to that Alvar was the only living man who knew where it was hidden, may easily be conceived. It was increased when tidings reached him that the elder Alvar was indeed on his way from Jerusalem; that he had learned at Rome the late events in Barcelona, had sent for his son to join him, and

had made a vow that he would not put off his armour till he had met Suniario face to face, and taxed him with the murder of his niece. Partly from revenge, partly from fear and covetousness, it became the usurper's object to render himself, with as little delay as possible, master of the father's life and the son's person. Juan of Ripol became his tool in this, as in many other schemes of villainy. He was unknown to the two Alvars, and he introduced himself to them at Rome as the master of a merchant vessel bound for Barcelona, offering to convey them thither. The sequel is known, or may easily be divined.

When the ship drew near that part of the coast on which the islet of San Pablo was situated, the father and son were seized and bound—not without a tremendous struggle—a boat was hastily lowered, and Juan and Enrique departed in it with their two captives. Alvar the True received his death wound before the eyes of his fettered son, and the dull, heavy plash of his body when they cast it into the sea, smiting upon the ears of one feeble, unsuspecting child, was the only evidence which told that so dark a deed had been perpetrated, to any except those who performed, and him who witnessed it. To break the spirit of the younger Alvar by grief and terror, and long solitary imprisonment, was Suniario's only hope of inducing him to give up his secret, and for this end he had taken his measures well. But they failed: craft is easily deceived when it would calculate the strength or the weakness of virtue. The weight which is supposed to be so *heavy* that the rope *must* stretch and crack, is, perhaps, lifted at once, only that it may crush him who affixed it.

Alvar kept his secret, and endured his captivity, proving himself the worthy heir of his father's imperishable name.

When Alvar had perfectly convinced himself of the identity of Nina with the blue-eyed laughing baby whom he had carried in his arms when he was a boy, and on whose tiny hand he had sworn fealty in the presence of her revered father, he did not fail to thank God for the great deed thus reserved for him in restoring her to the rank for which she was born.

"In this manner," thought he, "I may be permitted to win my father's glorious surname for myself, and to show the world that Alvar the True still lives in his son."

But he found great difficulty in making Nina comprehend her situation. Seated at his feet, in one of those natural alcoves among the rocks where they now habitually passed days of an intercourse as strange, and as suddenly grafted upon the stem of common life, as the occurrences of a dream—looking up into his face with eyes as full of innocence and wonder as they had been in that far-off time of babyhood,—she strained every energy of her mind to fathom his meaning.

"I have been a child," said she, meditatively. "I shall soon be a woman. What is it to be a princess? Is it something more?"

"Look into this pool beside us," answered the knight, "this little flower-garden of the seas; see how it swarms with life and beauty! Here is a cluster of tiny stars looking though a forest of silver leaflets; there, the auburn streamers wave upon the waters, and seem to carry sapphires *on their edges.* See, I lift one with my finger, and

show the secret treasures which lie beneath its veil. The sea-fairies have planted here a grove of little rose-coloured trees, close and pathless, where they may lose their way in the perpetual inner twilight; they have spread the rock below with carpets of crimson and orange, or hung it with draperies of the softest green, or fretted it with delicate traceries of crystal. The life to which I shall carry you is as sheltered—as rich in all things rare and lovely, as this small treasure-house of the rocks, and you will dwell in the midst of it like yonder proud sea-flower which stands alone, displaying all her charms, as though the whole scene had been made ready for her delight and in her honour. You will be the centre and the chief of all. You will move as the moon moves among the stars, like, yet nobler, controlling all, and shining above all."

Nina had her own private theory about the moon and stars, though she did not think this a fit opportunity for bringing it forward. The dubious, wistful light in her eyes grew no clearer. She felt that Alvar was speaking of something grand—something to be desired—but something altogether beyond her grasp. Some of her difficulties were such as he would never have divined. She could not conceive a multitude of human beings living in constant intercourse with each other. The highest flight which her fancy had yet achieved was to suppose that the court of which he told her might possibly consist of ten or twelve persons; and when she strove to imagine all these in a room together, she felt that it would be a strange and a wonderful spectacle. He tried another mode of reaching her imprisoned intelligence.

"We were speaking yesterday," said he, "of right and of wrong, and of God's law, which makes right and wrong. Now, when you are a queen, sweet Nina, you will be able to reward men when they do right, and to punish them when they do wrong; if they are poor, you can relieve them, if they are weak, it will be yours to protect and defend them. Men will wait upon your words, and watch your looks; and you can prevent or punish all oppression, or cruelty, or robbery. You will be like God upon earth, and you will be able to give something to God for all that He has given to you."

She rose up as though she were ready to take wing, her soul inspired with a sudden sense of the possibility and the beauty of justice.

"Oh," she cried, while the light of a multitude of new thoughts kindled and flashed in her eyes, "that is glorious! When will it come? Oh, how good and how beautiful I will make it all for God!"

"Yes," replied Alvar, earnestly; "and remember, He will ask whether you have done your work? He will come to you and say, 'How is it with My fair kingdom of Barcelona? Is there any foul evil which you have not tried to destroy?—any bitter cry which has sounded in your ears in vain? Are My temples built and My poor cared for? Do My people feel that My law is alive amongst them?'"

She knelt down at his feet with clasped hands as though she were going to say her prayers.

"I shall not always know," said she, tremulously, "what is *right and* what is wrong. You must teach me."

He laid his hand upon her radiant head.

"God will teach you," said he. "You have only to pray to Him, and to keep His law always in your own heart, and make your own thoughts and ways submit to it. And foul shame were it if I, your servant and His, were not ever ready to help you so far as my poor capacity extends."

"And this is *my* life," said Nina. "But now tell me of *yours*. You say that you are a poor knight, and that you have nothing but your name and your sword—how can you do anything for God with these?"

"I can do His will," replied the knight, reverently; "and the greatest can do no more. May He have pity when I fail to do it! I shall stand on the lowest step of your throne; and when you want to have a bold rebel chastised, or a right cause defended, or a fair deed of arms done in your service, you will know that I am ready. So did my father serve yours, and so I hope to serve you. And perchance, when you are safely seated on your throne, and when all your nobles have sworn fealty to you, you may have leisure to send me to fight for Christ against the infidel."

"But I will not send you," cried Nina; "and I will punish anybody who tries to hurt you; and I will make you very rich and very great—cannot I make you a king?"

He bowed, laughingly, upon her hand.

"Thanks, dear lady," said he; "but that would suit neither you nor me. And you will find many a better use for your riches than to bestow them on one who cares more for a bright sword than for a crown of gold. It is

my work to fight, and my joy also. I shall only beseech you to remember me in your orisons when I am away, and to say, 'Well done!' when I kneel at your feet on my return."

"I do not like it so!" exclaimed Nina, impatiently. "I will not have it so! You say I am to be a queen, and that all my servants must obey me, and you are my servant; and if I tell you never to touch your sword, but to stay always with me to take care of my flowers and my birds, you *must* do as I tell you, or you will be unfaithful and disobedient."

"Not so!" he replied. "I have my honour to keep; and if my queen bids me do what is shameful, I must remember my honour, and disobey her words. It is not fitting that a knight should tend flowers and birds like a maiden."

Nina sprang up, and stamped, passionately, with her foot.

"It *is* fitting," cried she, "and I *will* have it! Or, if not, I will have you punished! I will go away and never come near you again. I will tell Juan where you are when he comes back, and have you put into the cavern again. I hate you!"

Her airy form quivered with uncontrolled anger, and she was bounding away; but he caught her by the wrists and held her firmly, though gently, looking steadfastly into her eyes. Nina struggled and stamped, but she could not escape his grasp, nor could she endure for more than a moment that piercing, lordly look, the expression of a soul so much stronger than her own. Involuntarily she

turned her head aside, and drooped it upon her shoulder, as he held her; and then, while face, neck, and arms blushed half with shame, half with passion, she became still, and burst into tears.

"Ah, poor child!" said the knight, tenderly, as he released her; "thou hast never learned that it is a part of that law of God which thou art to watch and keep, to be gentle and self-restrained. Go now, if you will, and do not return, and tell Juan when he comes—"

"No, no, no!" sobbed Nina, at his feet. "Forgive me!"

He soothed her as gently as a nurse might soothe an infant; and when she was once more sitting calmly by his side, strove to make his lesson complete.

"Dost thou not see," said he, "how thine island stream, as it fumes and dashes among the rocks on its course to the sea, leaves ever and anon some tiny, sheltered nook of smooth water, which the projecting rock guards, and the tumultuous current reaches not? There thou mayest see perchance one bell of snowy foam, flung from the wrestling waters into this tranquil nest, and dwelling there, safe, and steadfast, though fragile. Such is a woman's life, dear Nina—so still, so pure, so separate! As the foam-drops lose their whiteness when they mix with the turbid, tawny waves, so is the purity of her spirit marred if tumult or violence be suffered to invade it. She must keep her delicate serenity like the one crystal bubble lying on its little couch of quiet water. This is hard for thee to learn, but take courage; and remember, that since our Father made thee a woman, He must needs have made

thee, also, capable of a woman's duty. And forget not, henceforth, that thou must never stand between a knight and his honour!"

VI.

Nina's education advanced daily, and perhaps it was well for her that the sphere of her instructor's knowledge was but limited. Certain simple ideas of faith and duty were all that he sought to impart, and even these were so bewilderingly new, that it was only the sure instinct of an unworn conscience which enabled her to assimilate them. They seemed to awaken in her mind a sense analogous to that which the first sound of music had awakened in her ear—a sense created and adapted to receive them—attesting the utterances of truth so instantly, that it might seem to have a share in producing them. As the needle springs to the first magnet which is brought near to it, without needing to be taught that this is its vocation, so her heart sprang to the knowledge and the love of good, as it was presented to her. This instinct is in us all, though defaced and abused; it is part of our birthright, and a part which too often we sell for a mess of pottage. But there is great difference between a conscience that knows not how to speak aright, and one that speaks wrongly; it is the difference between sleep and stupor. The first may contain the germ of a true and noble life; the other is too often the prelude to a death from which there is no resurrection.

There was a composure in Alvar's character exactly suited to shame Nina's impetuosity into gentleness; and a

simplicity in his philosophy well adapted to her half-formed intelligence. When she asked, "Why is this so?" he had no better answer than, "Because God wills it;" and, indeed, if he had lived nine centuries later, and immersed his mind into the profoundest whirlpool of metaphysics, it may be doubted whether he could have returned — supposing him to emerge from those waters undrowned—bringing with him a jewel of purer and truer lustre. It was curious to observe that her perpetual wonder never passed into incredulity. Such ideas as her mind could not by possibility hold, were quietly put aside till it should grow stronger, but nothing was rejected. She knew where to find all, and was ready to take all up again as soon as the light should come, and her power should be sufficient.

They were strange, bright, dreamy days, and they went rapidly by.

When Alvar issued from his cavern-bedchamber in the morning, and found the simple, solitary meal prepared, a feeling would sometimes steal upon him, as though he were living under the influence of enchantment; imprisoned, sustained, and companioned by some superhuman power: and if he stepped to the threshold, and, looking out, beheld that slight, buoyant figure standing in the morning light, carrying her head like a deer, and glancing at him with eyes as wild, as shy, and well-nigh as vague —it seemed no fancy to suppose her the weaver of the spell. It was as though he had caught a sea-fairy, and while binding her to his service, and striving to indoctrinate her in the ways and thoughts of men, were yet sub-

jected to her by an invisible and irresistible force. And when he drew her to his side to repeat after him such orisons as he could teach, and which she was long in learning to say without assistance, he could not at first get rid of the idea, if she stammered at some sacred word, that it would act as an exorcism, and he should see her cast aside her disguise of human beauty, and assume some fearful shape before his eyes. Her quick pity, her girlish tenderness, her eager, ardent, aspiring nature, so earnest, so incapable of all mockery, nay, even her burst of passion, now checked or not indulged without shame in his presence: these were, on the other hand, testimonies which avouched her genuine womanhood too strongly to be disbelieved.

Alvar could not enter his cavern at night without acute feelings of repugnance, almost of fear. The scene seemed actually to renew for him the time of his imprisonment. There stood the barrel still half filled with the meal, which had been his principal sustenance; there he could hear, through the silence of the night, the slow but constant dropping of the little rill which had so often moistened his fevered lips; there the narrow space which had comprised his whole sky, and in which, for him, dawn, noon, and sunset were imprisoned—the cruel grating which had prevented him from ever losing the full view of his misery even for one dreamy instant—nay, the very touch of the cold damp stone when he set his foot upon it—all bore irresistible and terrible witness to the reality of his sufferings. From this dark solitude he could never issue forth at dawn without a fresh sense of liberation. Freedom

was still deliciously new, and he felt as though he and life were still bidding each other a joyful welcome. At first there was a languor upon him which rendered it delightful to recline among the rocks, gazing wistfully over the waters, and watching the gradual succession of morning, noon, and eve, each unfolding her separate beauties, and weaving her own tapestry of light, and cloud, and colour, as though in a pageant prepared for his especial pleasure. Here, having chosen a spot from which, himself concealed, he commanded an unbroken view of that side of the islet in which the landing-cove was situated, he would lie all day, passing his hours, as it were, in a perpetual sigh of quiet relief and enjoyment.

Nina would bring him his food, and sit beside him, hearing all the marvellous histories he had to tell of that world which she was ere long to enter—making all the unlooked-for comments, asking all the wild, simple questions which the untaught activity of her fancy prompted. Sometimes, wearied a little with the stillness of these strange colloquies, she would bound away and skim over the rocks like a sunbeam, returning, perhaps, after half an hour's absence, breathless and glowing, her hands full of shells and seaweed, her curling tresses all besprinkled with spray. Sometimes she would scale some giddy height among the cliffs, from mere wantonness of daring, and when he called to her in terror, she would climb higher and higher yet, till, hanging above his head, she would look down upon him and laugh in triumph, proud that there should be something which she could do and he could not. He could win her to but little speech—only

brief questions, and sudden remarks, which broke from her, as it were, involuntarily; she was so unused to her own language that she spoke it with doubt and effort, and if the words were not broken, the thoughts were.

When he questioned her of her own life, her thoughts, her ways, her feelings—what she had done, and what left undone by habit—she answered always with docility, but with a strange look of dawn in her eyes, as though she had never thought of these things before, and the information were as new to her as to him. Yet there was intense delight in these first lessons in conversation; and, indeed, her heart was so full and so busy while they spoke together, that it seemed to her as though he must know all that was in it, and she felt as if she had poured it out before him, when she had in reality been most silent. Nor was this altogether a mistake, for the eloquence of look, of gesture, and of tone, imparted to him many a secret which the lips knew not how to pronounce.

After some time, the lassitude which his long imprisonment had caused gave way, and he retained little trace of his sufferings, save that serenity of character to which we have already alluded, and which was the fruit of that long-enforced solitude, during which a strong will, and pure conscience, had communed only with themselves and with Him who made them. But now the desire for action awoke, and the sense of delight in mere physical exertion.

Now, Nina had sometimes to keep watch for him while he assayed his restored energies, and explored the wildest recesses of the islet for himself. Now his talk became of

swords and steeds; of strong hearts and skilful hands; of work to be done, and of the glory and the delight of doing it.

Little enough did he tell her of his own exploits, speaking always of the future, in which he hoped, by God's help, to do somewhat, as though in the past he had done nothing; but he painted for her a picture of his father's life and of hers, striving to make her understand the scenes in which they had acted, the spirit which had prompted them, and the honour which they had won. And Nina listened amazedly, and with all her soul, and loved the Christian knights, and scorned the Moors, and wove imaginary wreaths for the conquerors, with feelings as strong as Alvar could desire, but with a very dim perception of the objects to which those feelings were directed.

Gradually she learned to conceive of the world as a wide and wonderful region, wherein a multitude of noble knights, all like Alvar, were ever marching about in a very staid and stately manner, speaking to each other in a kind of awful blank verse, and occasionally pausing to set their feet upon the necks of a multitude of crouching caitiffs, all exactly like Juan; while a multitude of beautiful damsels, *not* like herself—oh, no! far more exalted and superb—stood by and watched the process, saying, from time to time, to the knights—"Ah, well done! We are yours!" and to the caitiffs—"Die! for the earth has no need of you!"

This all seemed to her very moral and magnificent; though she could not help thinking, that if she were to *see* one of the caitiffs very badly wounded indeed, she

should do what she could to help him, while the knights were looking another way. And she wondered whether Alvar would be angry with her for this, but had not courage to ask.

He spoke much to her of his great master Hugh le Blanc, whom he held to be the noblest knight that the world has ever seen; and told her how she had been committed to his special guardianship; and how, when they should have effected their escape, and hidden awhile in the retreat of which he had told her, till the first fever of pursuit was passed, it was to this hero he intended to conduct her, and by his help that he expected to reinstate her in her dominion.

One evening he had been telling her how, when this glorious Duke Hugh was so great and so mighty in France that none dared cover their heads or speak their minds in his presence, and the king was dead, and the next heir was a feeble child who had fled to a remote and barbarous island named England, and all people thought that the duke, who had so long wielded the sceptre, would now wear the crown; how he stood up before them all, and said —"Not so; I am no king: I am only the first subject!"—and went and brought back the helpless sovereign, and set him on his throne, and maintained him there, and did homage to him.

"Because," said Alvar, "in his noble heart duty stands ever first, and self last; self being, indeed, with him, nothing more than the instrument by which he fulfils the decrees of conscience. He stands a rock among the waters, *dashing in pieces* whatsoever would seek to move it from

its base; receiving to a couch of safety whatsoever desires to take refuge, and to rest upon it. And the rest is, indeed, secure; for it is impossible that it should either move or yield. This, Nina, is what we call a hero; and in this career, death is but an accident, and not a close; for though it had its beginning on earth, it sweeps majestically upward, and holds its unbroken course above the stars."

"Are you, too, a hero?" asked Nina, her face reflecting the light in his.

"I am nothing yet," replied Alvar. "God knows what I may be! But I can walk diligently in his steps, and wear, like him, the truth ever next my heart."

"The truth!" said Nina, meditatively. "It seems so strange and hard that you say we ought always to speak the truth, even when it brings evil. Now, I would tell an untruth directly to save your life——or my own," she added, with unconscious naïveté, checking in a moment the natural emotion of tenderness which her first words had awakened in the breast of Alvar.

"Heaven pity thee!" cried he, more deeply shocked than he would have been, had she not so paused and so concluded her speech; "thou wouldst be guilty of foul wrong!"

"No, no!" exclaimed Nina, eagerly, "because I would not do it now that you have told me. Only I cannot understand. When I live in the world, I suppose I shall see that the truth is *always* beautiful; now it seems to me that it must be sometimes beautiful and sometimes cruel."

"Alas!" said Alvar, "that world, which thou dreamest

shall teach thee only the loveliness of truth, teaches too many to live without her altogether. Look not to the world, but to thine own soul. Canst thou not see, that if God bids thee speak the truth, His word must be obeyed always? When the truth brings good, thou speakest it because it is thine own will to do so; when it brings evil, thou speakest it because it is God's will. If there is no trial, there can be no obedience."

"Oh, I see! I see!" cried Nina, joyfully. "And whensoever evil or misery seem to be coming, I can think I hear you say, 'Now is God watching to see whether thou art obedient;' and then I shall know what is right and do it."

"Nina," said Alvar, "there have been those who died rather than forsake the truth, and deny that they were the servants of Christ!"

"Could *you* die so?" asked she, instantly.

Nina was very personal in the application of the rules he gave her, and often embarrassed him by her direct appeals to himself. She forestalled his answer in the present instance, by adding quickly—

"Oh, yes, I know you could; for it must have been harder to live those five years in that horrid prison than to die at once."

And she fell into a reverie on the beauty and power of truth. A great lesson for thee, Nina! Take it to thy heart. When once the soul has learned to breathe freely in any atmosphere but that of truth—when once truth is no longer necessary to its life—its progressive degradation may be certainly looked for. At any point in that down-

ward course it may pause, and, by God's mercy, open its eyes and retrace its steps in amazement and grief, and great bitterness. But, alas! its complete restoration is doubtful. The fineness of moral perception has been destroyed, the keen edge blunted, the delicate bloom effaced; lower aims, lower ideals, have become familiar; and the image of moral purity, if not altogether lost, is yet so disfigured and distorted that the soul sees beauty in evil, and has scarcely the power to distinguish evil from good. It has grown accustomed to the darkness, and the light, which should guide, can only blind it. If it at length regain the vantage ground from which it has so miserably descended, it arrives there wounded and weary, well-nigh exhausted by the struggle, well-nigh unfitted for future encounter.

Nina looked up at last.

"Are you happy here?" asked she, abruptly.

"I am so happy that I fear to go away."

Alvar gazed earnestly at her. "How beautiful she will be!" thought he. "How beautiful she is! Surely, life will be for her only a great pleasure-garden! Dear child," said he, aloud, "you will be far happier hereafter; you do not yet know what is before you. When you dwell in that court of which I have told you so often, and have a thousand greater warriors than I am waiting upon your smile, and a bevy of stately dames and bright maidens attending upon your wishes, and rich jewels to wear, and fair palfreys to ride, and music and dancing to chase away the merry hours, you will forget that you thought yourself happy here."

Nina met his gaze while he spoke, and continued for

awhile to look into his eyes with a strange, wistful expression. Then she suddenly laid her face down upon his hand, and burst into tears.

"Will they love me?" murmured she. "Will they teach me? Will they take care of me? Alas, alas! must I live always among strangers? Oh, promise—promise that you will never leave me."

Fool that I was! thought Alvar, indignantly, to think to satisfy her heart with such toys and trifles.

"Fear nothing! Do not weep!" said he. "Thy world will be as rich in love as in splendour. And I, thy truest servant, will stand before thee, ever waiting to do thy pleasure. Why, Nina, these tears become not a queen! Look up, sweet child, and think how bright a lot it will be to have true, and kind, and loyal friends ever dwelling around thee, bestowing love upon thee, and receiving happiness from thee!"

He spoke a little incoherently; for, to say the truth, those tears had found their way to his heart. He rose up, ashamed, after his knightly fashion, that any emotion should master him, and led her to the edge of the little terrace on which they were sitting, as if a sudden change of the position of body could change also the attitude of the mind. Nina shook the drops from her lovely eyes, and the ringlets from her transparent brow, with a quick, joyous movement, which showed that the burst of deeper feeling was over, and youth and hope were once more sovereigns in her breast.

"Look yonder," she cried, pointing with her hand. "Is the world more beautiful than that?"

The quiet sea was rocking softly up and down with a slumberous motion, not breaking into wave-crests, except where the rocks of the islet chafed it into a fringe of foam. Over those heaving waters there seemed to lie a thin veil of rose-coloured light, moving as they moved, and causing their sapphire-blue to palpitate with a thousand soft and living tints. Far away to the west, the sun was sinking through a gorgeous avenue of attendant clouds to the invisible palace prepared for his repose. The line of distant shore upon the horizon seemed like the frontier of fairy-land, with amber capes and ruby cliffs, all made transparent and luminous by the glowing atmosphere which invested them. Not a sound broke the magnificent silence of the hour, save the deep music of the tranquil waters.

Alvar looked, and was silent. As they stood there, hand in hand, dreaming strange fantasies of that enchanted coast on which their eyes were fixed, they became aware that a dark object was interposed been them and the lustrous distance. It moved with the movement of the waters, and seemed to grow larger as they gazed upon it. At the same instant they turned and looked wildly upon each other; and their hands closed in a stronger clasp, and their hearts well-nigh stood still. It was a boat!

They crouched under the rock and watched it as it came nearer. It was soon distinctly in view, and they could perceive that it held three persons; of whom two were rowing, while the third sat idly in the stern. It made straight for the islet.

"There are two hours free!" whispered Nina. "He will not think of looking for me till it is quite dark."

"A much shorter time would be enough," answered Alvar, "as he has no means of pursuit."

They spoke under their breath, though the boat was still far beyond earshot. Its approach seemed wearily slow. At length they could distinguish the stroke of the oars upon the water, and see the features of him who sat in the stern; the rowers had their backs towards them. The man, whose face was visible, had a mantle closely wrapped about him, and a leathern cap drawn low upon his brows. His countenance was dark, pallid, and fierce.

"It is Suniario himself," said the knight, involuntarily, but still cautiously subduing his voice.

Nina shuddered as she recognized the countenance which she had so often seen in her infancy, and once since.

The next instant one of the rowers turned his head, and his profile was for a moment defined against the glowing sky.

Alvar grasped Nina's trembling hand with sudden force, then dropped it, and fell upon his knees, covering his face.

"Ah, murderer of my father!" said he, in a deep muffled voice, like the stirring of a sword in its scabbard, "I cannot look upon thee."

The plash of the oars was now loud and rapid, and ere long it was succeeded by the slow grinding sound of the keel as it drove upwards upon the sand and shingle between the rocks. Nina threw herself upon Alvar as he knelt.

"Hold me lest I scream!" whispered she, in an accent of intense terror.

He *clasped his* arm about her, and placed his hand upon

her lips. It was but for an instant, and then a sudden and complete calmness came upon both, and nerved them as if by magic for what they had to do. They lay down upon their faces on the sand, and looked through a narrow opening at the boat. Juan and Enrique had sprung out and were dragging it into the nook where it was ordinarily kept. In another moment Suniario too stepped on shore. The oars were cast into the boat, and the three men began slowly and toilsomely to ascend the little ravine which wound upwards to the summit of the island. Suniario walked first; Juan hung back and stopped Enrique, drawing him aside, as if to give an order. One barrier of rock alone separated them from the trembling captives.

"Find Cisné," said Juan briefly to his servant. "Remember, she must not appear. Look among the rocks first, and then in the tower. I will hold him in parlance. If you find her not, wait till we are within the tower, and then watch for her."

Enrique nodded, and Juan strode after his master.

Nina clung to her companion. Enrique stood still a moment, as if irresolute in which direction he should seek her. She felt Alvar withdraw his arm, and rising to his knees, still in the shadow of the rock, softly pluck the dagger from his belt. But Enrique gave only a casual glance among the rocks below: they were none of Nina's haunts; they were too near the places where her masters were wont to be occupied when at home. He soon turned away, scaled the cliff by a shorter and steeper path than the others, and disappeared from their sight.

The moment was almost come. Nothing deterred it

but the fear lest Juan or Suniario should pause and look back. They moved leisurely upwards, and now at length passed a bend of the ravine, after which the landing cove and the rocks around it would no longer be visible to them. In an instant Alvar was across the rock and by the side of the boat. A light breeze had sprung up in the last few minutes, and the surge against the cliffs was loud enough to leave but little fear that his movements would be audible above. One vigorous pull, and the little bark is afloat, and Alvar, lifting Nina in his arms, who shakes and cannot stand or move, has leaped into it. He placed the terrified girl in the bottom of the vessel, laid the oars gently in their rests, but held them upwards and did not use them. He waited till the current should have drifted the boat a little way, lest the sharp unmistakable sound in the water should reach the men on the island. Slowly it steals outwards and rounds the first headland of the rocks, as if impelled by some invisible force of its own. Now they are in the still water, and now the oars begin to dip, and the bark shoots forward like a bird.

"God be praised!" said Alvar, after a long silence, during which he breathed as strongly and as sternly as though each breath had power to propel the little vessel. "God be praised! We are safe!"

And the island cliffs frowned behind them, dark and unconscious, dwindling in the distance, as they went westward over the glowing waters into the bosom of sunset,—like the course of a joyful hope, which brightens as it advances, yet ever has the brightest spot before it.

VII.

"Look back, Nina!" cried Alvar. "Look for the last time at San Pablo!"

Nina raised herself from the bottom of the boat, where, in a kind of terror, she had been cowering at his feet from the moment in which they started. A feeling of regret, soft and sudden as a twilight breeze in summer, swept over her heart as she gazed her farewell upon the islet. It lay in the distance, dark and still, as a reproach lies upon the heart. Heavy masses of cloud, fretted with thin embroideries of ever-moving vapour, hung above it; and, beneath their canopy, the sea looked almost black. The gloom was more striking from its contrast with the gorgeous array of light and multitudinous colour towards which the boat was advancing. Suddenly—who has not seen such a sight?—the whole eastern heaven, touched as it were in a moment with shame for its want of sympathy with the last glory of the day, blushed into one vast effulgence of rose-coloured light; each separate cloudlet glancing and glittering with its share in the general shower of splendour. Nina sighed and clasped her hands.

"Ah!" said the knight, "will memory hereafter cast a glow like this around your island life, sweet Nina, when you look back upon it from the world? Look steadily—it is not real: see how it passes away!"

And, in truth, the illumination was as evanescent as it had been instantaneous. While they gazed, it faded; and there was again the cold, purple island, and the sombre waters, and the funereal sky. In another moment

the boat had swept round a curved headland of the coast, and the last glimpse of San Pablo ceased to be visible.

It seemed strange to Alvar, that silent, swift rowing along the darkening waters, with Nina's slight figure couched at his feet, and her large, wondering eyes looking wistfully at him through the twilight. He felt as if it were to be thus always: as if daylight and speech were passing away from him altogether; and he must row on thus, never resting and never weary, through all time, with those marvellous eyes upon him. But for very shame, he would have besought her to turn away her gaze, lest the shore should change, and the sea stretch farther and farther, and they never reach their haven. At length she spoke, and then the wild unnatural feeling ceased.

"Are we near?" asked she.

He strained his gaze fixedly upon the coast.

"We have scarce a mile farther to go," said he.

And even by that dim light Nina could see how his face, which was all flushed with the exertion of rowing, grew white in a moment.

"I have never told you," he added, dropping his voice, "who dwells in the house to which I am going to take you—who dwelt there, I should rather say, five years ago."

"You said they were friends," said Nina, in her gentlest tones, drawing close to his side with quick sympathy for the emotion which she saw, but understood not. "Are they very dear friends? Who are they?"

"My mother and my sister," replied Alvar, briefly, and

he rested upon his oars a moment, bowing his face upon his knees.

Presently he looked up; and, being now quite calm, told her how it was.

The wife of Alvar the True, a stately and venerable lady, of noble blood and unblemished virtue, had withdrawn from the Court of Barcelona at the death of Count Miro, partly because the customs of the new court were ill-suited to her regular and pious manner of living; partly that all amusement or publicity was distasteful to her while she mourned for the absence and captivity of her lord. She retired, therefore, to a solitary mansion on the sea-coast which had been part of her dowry; and having a small band of retainers around her, rather for defence in case of danger, than for state, she occupied herself in works of charity amongst the surrounding poor, and in the education of her only daughter, whom she desired to train up for a matronhood as sober and dignified as her own. None at Barcelona cared to trace her retreat, and very soon her existence was altogether forgotten. The perfect and harmless seclusion in which she lived, had obtained for her the privilege of complete neglect. Her son doubted whether Juan of Ripol knew that there was such a person; and though Suniario's presence on the islet might seem at first to increase the probability of pursuit and discovery, he thought, on reflection, that they had no reason to fear him. He had not wasted a thought upon the helpless widow; and it was in the highest degree improbable that he knew where she had taken refuge. He might remember her now; but while he was search-

ing out the place of her abode, Alvar hoped to find some surer retreat both for her and for Nina.

Thus confidently he spoke, but, as they neared the shore, his brow grew dark and his heart sank. The picture of a desolated hearth was ever before his eyes, and the note of a funeral bell was tolling ominously through his thoughts; even the venerable innocence of his mother's old age might not have secured her from suspicion or violence; even the solitude of this remote hiding-place might not have proved beyond the tyrant's reach. When the boat shot at last beneath the overhanging darkness of the cavern—as a bird darts into the deep bosom of a tree when the storm is about to break—and when his uncertain hands had felt along the rock and found the iron ring, and passed the rope through it, and he could see dimly and imperfectly the lowest step of the roughly-hewn stair by which they were to ascend, he had scarcely breath to tell Nina where they were, scarcely strength to lift her upon the shore. In absolute silence he walked slowly upwards, and she climbed after him, as silent, and as full of fear; the cold, close grasp in which his hand held hers, scarcely serving to re-assure her. When they were within two or three steps of the top, he suddenly halted, staggered, and with difficulty preserved his footing. Nina could hardly suppress a cry of terror. He stooped down to her ear, and said in a thrilling whisper, "There are lights in the windows!" And in another moment, she, too, had ascended high enough to catch a glimpse of the old, grey, fortified house, and to see the welcome gleam from its arched casements, which told of life and habitation

within. It stood on the edge of the cliff; one side rising abruptly from the precipice towards the sea; the other, in which was the entrance, defended by a wall and gateway, and not visible from the shore.

If Nina had thought her companion strangely tardy till now, she had no reason to think so any longer. She could scarcely keep pace with the fiery speed at which he sprang forward, still grasping her by the hand, and hurrying her along with him. They reached the outer wall, but she knew not how they crossed it. He seemed to leap rather than to scale it, with her in his arms, and she found herself, breathless and panting, on the other side, within the court of the little castle. That part of the building which constituted the dwelling-house was now directly opposite to them, and the friendly lights seemed to smile out of the dark, lead-coloured wall, and to beckon them onwards. But Alvar stood still, and looked doubtfully around him. After a pause he whispered once more to Nina—

"The joy may kill them. I scarcely know what to do. Yonder is the window of the hall in which they were ever wont to sit in the evening. Let me raise you in my arms, dear Nina, that you may lift the edge of the curtain and look in, and tell me—tell me who sits in the old place beside the hearth."

He lifted her as he spoke; and, light and agile, she sprang in an instant upon the stone sill of the window, and twined one arm around the central bar or pillaret which sustained it. There was barely room for her to support herself outside, but the casement was very deeply *splayed* within, and, at the inner edge, there hung a heavy

curtain of crimson stuff, stamped and fringed with silver, which protected the chamber from the night air. Passing her disengaged arm through one of the interstices between the pillaret and the wall, she was able to reach this curtain, and cautiously to move it a little aside. She then stooped forward, and, entering the aperture as far as she could, peeped timidly in. After a single glance she dropped the curtain, and, aided by Alvar's arm, descended once more to the ground.

"What saw you?" asked he, in a faltering voice.

"There is a great room within," answered Nina, "and a fire of wood burning on the hearth, and, by the fire, there sits an aged lady, straight and upright as the staff which stands beside her. She is clothed in black, and wears a black hood; on her head is a white coif; she has grey hair and a stately countenance, and her eyes are dark, and shine like stars. She is spinning, but she does not stoop over the wheel, and, while I looked at her, she stopped and sighed, and then span on more quickly than before."

"Grey hair! grey hair!" cried the knight, who, with his hands on Nina's shoulders, and his eyes fixed on hers, was drinking in every word with a troubled and painful joy. "Alas, my mother! it was brown when last I saw thee! Can five weeping years do so much?"

"It is white as the coif which binds it now," answered Nina; "but her face is bright, and a little stern, and I think she frightens me. And a man in dark clothing sits opposite to her, and holds something in his hand which I never saw before; it had streamers like sea-weed, only

wider, and all of the same size and shape; they are white, and have black marks upon them; and he looks at them as if he was set to watch them lest they should do some evil. And all the while he is talking in a low, heavy voice, which never ceases. And a lamp is burning on the table, near the hearth, but the rest of the room is dim. I think there are more people in it, but I could not see, for I looked only at those two."

Still Alvar kept silence, and still his hands rested on Nina's shoulders. He withdrew them at last, with a deep, soft sigh, and two great tears rolled down his cheeks, as on the night when Nina first saw him, and thought that she was dreaming. He moved towards the entrance-door, saying, at the same time, "And the younger lady, Nina; how looked she? Thou hast told me nothing of her!"

"There was no younger lady in the room," answered Nina.

The knight breathed short and quick, but said nothing: she could see that his hands trembled, and when they reached the threshold he stopped again.

"Go in," said he, huskily, waving his hand towards the portal to supply by gesture the meaning which he could scarcely articulate—"go in, and say that I am come. Dear Nina!" (she was looking at him with indescribable terror) "you must do this for me. Were she—were my dear and honoured mother to see my face at once, she might die."

And Nina, not knowing what she did, nor whither she went—knowing only that an irresistible force impelled her—walked straight into the chamber, and stood still

between the aged lady and the monk that was reading to her.

Up rose all from their seats, startled and greatly amazed, staring in astonishment upon the child. She stood there trembling, in her coarse, scanty garment, with her bare, bright feet and arms, her tangled veil of auburn tresses hanging to her waist and half covering the beautiful face with its wild, wonderful, purple eyes — the strangest intruder that ever walked in an instant into the midst of a grave family party. The monk addressed her in Latin; the servants screamed and called upon the saints; the lady was silent, and looked upon her in proud and steadfast surprise. To her Nina turned with desperate resolution, and said, stretching out her suppliant hands,—"Ah, lady, there is joy! Your son is come!"

Pale and stern, the mother sat down again, keeping her right hand upon her heart, and motioning impatiently with her left, that the girl should be taken away. She had no faith for the tidings; but she felt the words go wildly through her soul, and she could not bear them.

Nina's terror was extreme as the monk and the servants drew near her; she half screamed, and exclaimed, "It is true! He has escaped, and brought me hither! He is there without! Ah, do not touch me—do not hurt me. Keep away from me!" (drawing herself up, and stamping, not in pride, but in utter fear, as she tried the only means of repelling them which occurred to her) "I am the Countess of Barcelona, and you are all my servants! Oh, Alvar, help me!"

She broke from them with a bound, and was flying out

at the door, when the sight of Alvar reassured her. She clung to his arm as he walked forward and kneeled down at the feet of his mother, who had once more risen and advanced to the centre of the chamber, half maddened by Nina's words. Stately as the lady was, her son had to carry her to her seat; and, for a few minutes, no sound was heard but her low sobs, as she hid his face in her bosom, and the soft, scarcely audible words which he murmured in her ear as he wrapped his arms about her.

Nina, touched and silent, wept quietly for sympathy.

"Praised be God!" said the mother at last, as she lifted her head, and wiped away her tears. "He hath, in truth, made the heart of the widow to sing for joy!"

She advanced a little way into the room, still keeping her arms around her son, and supported by him.

"My friends," said she, in a broken voice, making an affectingly vain effort to resume that dignity of deportment which scarcely ever forsook her—"My friends, here is your master!"

The domestics clustered around, kissing Alvar's hand with every demonstration of eager and respectful joy. The knight kneeled humbly down to receive the monk's benediction; but not even then did his mother unloose the clasp in which she had encircled him. With a movement too quick for him to prevent it, she kneeled by his side, and the priest laid a hand on each head, and mother and son thus, still in a close embrace, received his blessing together.

Preparations were now made for supper; and the two fugitives withdrew to change their wet garments and

make ready for the meal. Nina, who had been hastily presented to the lady of the mansion, but who was scarcely noticed by her in the midst of such bewildering emotions, was entrusted to the care of two staid and sober damsels, to whose operations she submitted herself in a state of silent wonder. They undressed her—a very brief and easy process, when the simplicity of her toilet is considered—they apparelled her in many strange, unknown vestments, which she thought it was tedious to put on and difficult to wear, placing over all a robe of pale blue silk with a girdle of silver, partially covered by a veil or mantle of black gauze spotted with silver also, under which her luxuriant tresses were gathered up. They bathed her feet and bound sandals upon them; and this she would fain have resisted, as it seemed to her a most uncomfortable and unreasonable arrangement; it was so unnecessary an obstacle in walking, that she could not help suspecting it was done to prevent her from running away, as she remembered that, long years ago, when they lived in the mountains, Dame Pacheca was wont to tie two of the goat's legs together to restrain it within due limits. She glanced down, however, at the feet of her tormentors, and saw that they were similarly imprisoned; and as she felt a proud, uneasy consciousness that she was an object of wonder and curiosity to them, she determined not to betray her ignorance by any expression of surprise or repugnance. She sat, therefore, in perfect silence, while they busied themselves about her, as though she had been a doll; and the only thought which greatly troubled her was a doubt whether she should be able

to stand without help when she was set upon her feet.

As the waiting-women drew forth the garments in which they were to clothe her, one said to the other—

"I know not how our lady will brook the sight of this robe; she has looked on nothing which could remind her of the lady Ynes since that fatal day."

"Fear not, Jacinta," was the answer; "if she feels aught she will not show it. Besides, she strictly bade us find fitting vestments for the maiden, and thou knowest it is ill disobeying her. Mine were a world too long, and thine a world too wide; there are none others that she could wear, save these."

"Will the Señora tell her name?" asked Jacinta, who seemed the more voluble of the two, as she clasped the girdle, and arranged the folds of the black transparent veil, through which Nina's ivory shoulders and rich tresses seemed absolutely to glitter.

"I marvel whether she has the use of speech!" added the woman, in a whisper to her companion.

"I am called Nina," replied the girl.

And, with instinctive reserve, she forbore to tell her name and her history.

"And has the Señora come far to-night?" pursued Jacinta. "Does she live far from here, and will she remain here long?"

"I belong to the Lord Alvar, and I am to live with him, and I wish to be taken to him directly," replied Nina, without an instant's hesitation.

Nina was very much scared, and a little angry; but she

thought this was altogether the wisest and the safest answer she could make.

The two waiting-women opened their eyes in the widest astonishment, and stared at each other and at her. They had not been in the hall when she arrived, and had wondered not a little when she was given over to their charge in a manner which seemed to imply that she was a person of some consequence. Their wildest conjectures had not, however, attained to anything so extraordinary as this, and they did not know what to make of it, and were more than half inclined to doubt her sanity. When they conducted her to the hall they were glad enough to enter with her, and take their place among the other domestics, that they might hear and see whatever was about to follow.

"Belongs to the Lord Alvar, indeed!" whispered Jacinta to the elder damsel. "Who would have thought that the son of our most Christian Lord Alvar would have brought a wild, heathen creature like this home to his mother! And a beggar to boot—didst note her garment? I would not have donned it for a penance!"

"There is a doom upon the race!" replied the other, solemnly. "God keep our noble mistress from a broken heart!"

Alvar sprang up as they entered the chamber, and taking Nina by the hand led her to the lady of the mansion. He had been watching so impatiently for her arrival that he had scarce been able to bear his part in conversation with his mother and the good priest, though he had as much to tell as they to ask; he did, indeed,

feel as though she belonged to him, and he was uneasy lest she should be in any way injured or frightened if she were out of his presence for a moment.

"Mother," said he, "you must take this dear and noble maiden to your heart both for her own sake and for mine. I have told you who she is, and what she has done for me."

The lofty lady rose up and made a grave and deliberate obeisance before poor Nina, who, gazing timidly from Alvar's face to hers, and quite overpowered by reverence for her age and her dignity, dropped involuntarily upon her knees. She could not have behaved in a manner more suited to impress Dame Ermenberga favourably. The lady smiled approvingly to her son, raised the prostrate girl, and solemnly kissed her brow.

"We will endeavour to give thee fitting entertainment, noble maiden," said she, "and to train and teach thee as a Christian maiden should be trained and taught. We know that thy misfortunes and the crimes of others have withheld from thee the privileges of thy birth, and while our son labours to restore the outward right, it shall be our business to supply the inward culture. And now I pray you sit and eat, for you must be both weary and faint."

Nina ate her supper in great terror of mind, glancing shyly about her, and speaking only in whispers, like a frightened child, which in truth she was. She took some comfort from the bright encouraging looks which Alvar constantly directed towards her, and once derived immense satisfaction from thrusting her hand into his beneath the

table; a movement which, fortunately for her, was not perceived. Dame Ermenberga was still too full of recent and deep emotion to be very vigilant or critical; but she was somewhat troubled by the circumstance that she could on no pretext induce her guest to speak to her. Whatsoever remark she addressed to Nina, the girl answered in the lowest possible whisper, fixing her large eyes on Alvar's face, and unmistakably directing her words to him. He, acting as interpreter, repeated what she had said to his mother, very much as if it were in a foreigu tongue and needed translation. He was unspeakably watchful and anxious about her, and felt a sense of relief when the meal was over and the hour of repose arrived. Though he knew that he was breaking the solemn ordinances of the household, he followed Nina quickly from the room, and detained her at the base of the turret-stair, while Jacinta, who was to light her to her couch, paused halfway up the ascent. He put his arms tenderly around her, and spoke to her in the gentlest tone.

"God bless thee, dear Nina! Thou art safe here—remember I am always near and always ready. It is strange to thee at first, but my mother will soon love thee as a daughter, and thou wilt find that she is so good and so noble. Sleep soundly and happily, and meet me in the court to-morrow morn with a bright face, and tell me that thou feelest thou art at home."

"Oh, I am frightened! I am frightened!" was Nina's murmuring answer, as she hid her face on his shoulder.

"I know it, my wild-flower!" he replied playfully; "but there is no cause for fear, and it will soon melt

away. Soon, very soon, Nina! But you are so beautiful in this courtly attire that I am ashamed to look upon you" (he held her at arm's length as he spoke, and gazed upon her with no assumed admiration). "See, now you look like a queen, indeed, and I feel that I am only your servant. It needs but a coronet on this fair brow" (touching it lightly as he spoke), "and I must kneel and pay my homage, and it will be mine to feel fear. Nay, Nina, I shall chide in earnest if thou art still afraid. Am not I here to protect thee, and hast thou not faith in me?"

And Nina smiled, and felt all her fears vanish as the frost-pearls melt when the sun shines upon them. A delicious sense of safety and repose stole into her heart, and Alvar was contented as he saw the old bright look come back to her lovely face. He was leaving her, when she detained him an instant, and said earnestly,—

"*May* I ask of your sister?"

The knight lifted his hand as though the word were substantial and he could thrust it away from him—as though he *did* so thrust it away from him with unhesitating force. "Name her not before my mother!" said he in a deep, suppressed voice; "name her not to me! God's wrath has stricken our house. She is dead!"

And Nina went up to her apartment sorrowing deeply for his sorrow, and forgot not to say diligently the orisons which he had taught her, and lay down marvelling greatly at the spaciousness of the chamber and the softness of the couch, and was borne away from earth by the swift sleep and busy dreams of childhood, with the light of those kind and powerful eyes shedding peace and hope upon

her heart, through all its mazy wanderings and unreal dangers. And Alvar, after a moment's pause, during which a dark, downward look came upon his face which we have never seen there before, went back to the hall to receive with good-humoured patience the rebuke which he well knew his mother had in store for him, and to bespeak from her as much indulgence for his wild maiden of the seas as might be possible to her somewhat stern, though noble character. The vision of that wonderful and lovely womanhood into which Nina seemed to have shot up in an instant before his eyes, shed upon his dreams a light as radiant as he was unconsciously shedding upon hers. It was strangely blended with a picture of grey sky, and heaving waters, and dying sunset, and a boat going swiftly forwards by a dark and rocky coast, and a figure couched at his feet within the boat, with eyes of superhuman and mystical beauty fixed ever wistfully upon his own.

VIII.

"Rise, maiden!" said Dame Ermenberga; "it is not seemly that thou shouldst sit thus ever, couched at my son's feet as if thou wert his favourite hound!"

It was on the second evening of Nina's arrival, that her hostess thus addressed her, and it may be doubted whether the girl would have obeyed, had not the command been seconded by a half-imploring glance from Alvar. She rose, therefore, with a mixture of shame and anger in her beautiful countenance, and took her seat at the board where Mistress Juana, the chief of the lady's waiting-women,

was preparing some embroidery for her future instruction and torment. There was a little sullenness in the manner in which she half averted her drooping head, and received the work with lax, careless fingers, and look askance; but her temper, though proud and impetuous, was both generous and sweet, and she was soon busily employed, taking all the pains that she could, and making as many mistakes as it was possible to comprise within the limits of a single evening.

That decorous and stately matron, Dame Ermenberga, had endured with ill-suppressed impatience Nina's extraordinary habit of curling herself upon the floor at Alvar's feet whenever she had nothing particular to do, and found that she was expected to take her place in the family circle. Out of consideration for her son's earnest and deprecating entreaties, the lady had forborne to speak as long as she could; but having watched her singular guest closely and with much dissatisfaction for two days, she became convinced that a course of active discipline would be necessary if Nina was ever to take her place as Princess of Barcelona with any sort of respectability, and that the truest kindness was to begin it at once.

There was not the slightest ill-will in Dame Ermenberga's feelings, though, if the truth must be told, she did not regard the new member of her household with an approving eye, and thought that her introduction was one of the most uncomfortable episodes that had ever occurred in her domestic history. She felt very much as an orderly, dignified, and extremely particular housekeeper of the present day might be expected to feel if her favourite

son were to return from college, bringing with him a young red Indian, whom he should earnestly commend to his mother's care and entertainment as an inmate during the long vacation.

It would be difficult to describe Alvar's feelings on the same subject. Brought up in the strict, old, northern habits of decorum and reverence in the intercourse of the sexes, which the Spanish Goths inherited from their fathers, and which in the tenth century were developing, or about to develop, into all the fantastic yet beautiful ramifications of that system which we call chivalry, Nina was, to him, an anomaly which he could judge by no rule and test by no standard already in his hands. Woman, for him, stood on a pedestal, from which it were profaneness to dislodge her; and the relation which he bore to her, at once protecting and worshipping, was—to borrow a great master's simile—like that of the heathen priest to the mute and helpless divinity whose temple it is his business to guard. Withdrawn as she was within the sacred recesses of domestic life, shrouded by a stately modesty which none save the worthless would voluntarily lay aside, and which he would have died rather than invade, the possibility of familiar intercourse with any woman save with a mother, a sister, or a wife, had never crossed his knightly thoughts. In early girlhood these fair, mysterious beings were invisible, or if seen at a distance on public occasions, or flitting across the background of the courtly or domestic picture, they neither spoke nor were spoken to, but remained aloof and inviolate, like the bud of some delicate and costly plant which

we dare not touch or breathe upon, lest we should prevent it from expanding into the blossom. For him the precious name of wife included the idea of years of patient and respectful approach, during which the divinity, still uncomprehended and unwon, might, perhaps, from time to time, vouchsafe a smile, but should by no means descend or reveal herself; and of the final conquest of a treasure which should be entirely and exclusively his own, continuing for all future time as much a mystery to others as she had hitherto been to himself.

These principles were part of Alvar's self, and they were neither abandoned nor forgotten, though they were now violated at every moment. Nina had been to him at first, by turns a wonder, a plaything, and a pupil; and in the new and strange delight of daily unbroken intercourse with a creature so fascinating, he had never paused to analyse the relation in which they stood to each other.

But now, when they had left that lonely island-life, and returned to a region the laws of which he knew so well and she broke so constantly, he felt in the very depth of his heart that, in the full sense of her own simple phrase, she "belonged to him." She was a possession, and he must, indeed, protect her, for no one else could. He must stand between her and mankind, and interpret the one to the other. He felt accountable to his own conscience for every offence she committed, and for every cloud that glided across her exquisite face. He lived in a perpetual fever; foreseeing, almost forestalling every unconscious outrage which she offered to his mother's ways and laws; having constantly active in his mind, on each

such occasion, a respectful acknowledgment of the justice of the rule, an intense delight in its violation, and an absolute misery at the effect which such violation must produce.

These incompatible feelings he reconciled by some logic of his own, too profound for us to fathom. But though he could thus reconcile them in his own heart, it was, alas! impossible to make outward and tangible incompatibilities equally harmonious. *He* might be content to recognize the propriety of all the social rules, having to every rule one exception, and that exception Nina; but he could not expect others to accept this reasoning. The anxious and passionate tenderness with which he surrounded her, ever ready as it were to spring forward and to be her shield, desirous that, if possible, she might be allowed to pursue her own path without encountering even one momentary check, seemed to his mother unreasonable and absurd. There can be no doubt that it was strangely inconsistent with that somewhat lordly and severe temperament which he had inherited from herself, and which hitherto had enabled him to endure, to contemplate, or even to inflict, any amount of pain which duty might render necessary, with unhesitating resolution, though, in the last two cases, with regret and sympathy. Here, however, there was no question of regret or sympathy—here was positive point-blank resistance; and, inconsistent though it might be, so it was, and he could not help it. Instead of quietly perceiving and admitting the fact that Nina must go through a period of discomfort and discipline ere she could be fitted for the rank in which

she was to move, he set himself against it on the very threshold, and seemed as eager to dash the medicine from her lips as though it were poison. The only practical effect which his mother's opposite view produced upon him was, that the course of lessons which he had so profitably commenced on the island was altogether abandoned, and that an even tenor of indulgence, sympathy, and defence—in short, of boundless petting and spoiling—was substituted for it. He seemed to consider it his business to be perpetually making amends to his darling for such annoyances as his utmost care could not always succeed in warding away; and to think that the task of controlling her had passed so completely into other hands that he had nothing to do with it. Yet he could rule her by a word, a tone, a glance; and these he sometimes employed, though only when he perceived that their employment might, as in the instance with which we commenced our remarks, prevent a scene which must terminate in something even more painful to her than the abandonment of her present will. It would have been well for her had she been left entirely in his hands: the tenderness with which he now treated her would not have diminished, while there would have been added to it a wisdom and a firmness, in which, with all our respect for our hero, we are obliged to confess that he was just now a little deficient. For, to express the character of his behaviour concerning her in a single sentence, we may say that he could not endure that the smallest possible amount of vexation should be inflicted upon her during a single moment of time; and that if it were necessary to turn one

hair of her head in a direction different from that which nature had given it, he would have thought it an injury not to be allowed to perform the operation himself, and would have doubted whether, when it should be completed, it could possibly be an improvement.

As for Nina herself, she was puzzled and disconcerted by her new position, and was in great danger of looking back upon her island life—at least upon the last month of it—with regret; and suffering memory to invest it with just such a sunset radiance as that which had rested upon the actual San Pablo when she bade it farewell. Generalizing in her own simple way from the instances of her limited experience, she was inclined to place Dame Ermenberga somewhere in the same class with Juan and Pacheca, and to arrive by induction at a new law of nature—namely, that "all aged persons are disagreeable." Dame Ermenberga would have wondered greatly, could she have known how she was estimated; but if she had known that an opposite law existed also in Nina's mind, based upon her personal observation of Alvar, and declaring that "all young knights are delightful," the stately lady would, indeed, have been terribly scandalized. The sweetness and gaiety of Nina's temper, her perfect inexperience, her buoyant child-nature, prevented her from being actually made unhappy at first; and, indeed, so long as Alvar was with her, it did not seem possible that she should be otherwise than happy. Vague misgivings, fears that she was not welcome to her hostess (a point on which the youngest child is sometimes marvellously sensitive), passed occasionally, and with increasing frequency, through her

mind, stirring that secret fire of pride which lurked in its depths, and might possibly blaze forth some day to astonish her companions. She had not forgotten that Alvar had taught her that she was a queen; this lesson at least she had learned by heart; and though she would have laid her crown at his feet at any moment, she felt no small inclination to place it on her own brow, and wear it royally whenever she confronted Dame Ermenberga.

All these rebellious impulses were, however, kept in restraint by Alvar's presence, and by the recollection that Ermenberga was his mother. The latter thought caused her to reproach herself, when she was otherwise than submissive, and to recall her unfavourable judgment as often as it was pronounced; the former satisfied all the cravings of her awakening heart, and soothed and filled it with a happiness so profound, that it left no space for discontent, and kept all the evils of her lot in abeyance, and, so to speak, out of sight, at least for the time. The dark possibility of his leaving her never loomed for a moment upon the clear horizon of her thoughts.

They had no tidings from San Pablo, and were quite ignorant of the effect which their escape had produced, and of the measures which had, doubtless, been taken to discover their retreat; but Alvar thought it unwise to remain in a place where there was so much probability of discovery, and he therefore effected the removal of the family as soon and as secretly as possible. Their new abode was selected and prepared for them by the good priest who had borne Dame Ermenberga company on the evening of Alvar's return, and whose wanderings about the

land to visit the sick, to comfort the afflicted, and to preach to the ignorant, had introduced him to many a secret nook and woodland fastness which ordinary travellers might have failed to penetrate.

They journeyed many miles inland in a westerly direction, and arrived at their destination late on the fourth day. It was a small fortress, of considerable strength, which had stood a fierce siege in the days of Tarik and Theodomir, and had lain dismantled and abandoned ever since. A very little preparation sufficed to render it habitable, and during the period of their enforced concealment they attempted nothing more.

Castle Muza, so called from a tradition that the great Emir had once, for a short time, occupied it, stood on the borders of an extensive forest, at the entrance of the hill-country. A stream issued from the recesses of the wood, and filling the moat which circled the stern, grey towers, passed swiftly onwards, and swelled into a river ere it reached the sea. It paused, as if to examine the sombre and deserted walls, and then hurried away from them, rejoicing in its escape, and expanding into double life and power as it withdrew farther and farther from so gloomy a spectacle.

A little village had once nestled in the shadow of the castle, but it had been sacked and pillaged; and such of its inhabitants as fell not by the Moorish scimitar had wandered away, never to return. A few mounds, whose artificial origin was revealed by their abrupt rise and somewhat regular formation, and a fragment or two of shattered and flower-tufted wall, were the only traces now left of its existence.

It was broad, bright noonday when our travellers reached this picturesque solitude, and leaving the prostrate hamlet to their right, ascended the banks of the stream, and crossed the rude drawbridge.

A perfect rainbow of wild flowers and emerald mosses clothed and crested every blunted angle and ruinous embattlement, and seemed as though, by the gay endearments of a young and playful life, it would fain beguile the old, sad ruin out of its melancholy.

Nina's rapture, when she beheld the forest, stretching away over the plain, and climbing the clefts of the hills, mocking the tyrant sun with its green, cool, impenetrable darkness, is not to be described. Nature's grandest spectacles—her forests, her mountains, and her oceans—have two classes of sensation at command, which they awaken in turn, according to the mood of the beholder. To the sea belong ideas of power, majesty, freedom—of never-resting life, and illimitable joy; or wild dreams of utter desolation, and perfect helplessness; of strength without sympathy, and labour without repose; breathings of despair, deep, still, and terrible. The forest, with its leafy cloisters, its winding lights and massy, motionless shadows, its canopied mazes which the eye cannot penetrate though the foot may, its world of melody which fills it like sunshine, glancing from every leaf, and making sweet revelations of the life that dwells in many a far, shrouded, untrodden recess—the forest awakens in us a sense of home, and shelter, and secresy, of solitude without desertion, of tempting mysteries which it is delicious to investigate; or thrills us with unknown and nameless

terrors, as though we were unable to withdraw the foot which we had once set within its magic precinct, but must advance ever further and further into a kingdom whose laws we know not, and whose phantom-citizens may start into sight at any moment in one of those vistas down which the eye glances so shyly, scarcely venturing to rest, yet fancying that forms and aspects are changing even while it looks on them.

Nina, in the highest degree imaginative and susceptible, gave herself up without restraint to each of these sensations as it arose, and clung to Alvar's arm, that he might protect her from she knew not what, and looked up in his face that she might be sure of his sympathy, and that he might interpret to her the beauty of her own delight.

Alvar's first business was to render the place defensible in case of attack, and to secure a means of retreat. The latter was easily accomplished, as there had been a subterranean passage from the keep, the outlet of which was within the forest; and this it was only necessary to open and clear in order to make it available. The precautions which he took puzzled Nina, who thought that so long as he was free and able to wield his sword, nothing could possibly harm them; more especially now, when he had at least half-a-dozen stout and faithful serving-men to back him. She would have understood the matter better had she known that he was providing for the safety of the household during his own approaching absence.

Hugh of France was at Narbonne; and after much consultation with Dame Ermenberga and the priest, it was decided that Alvar should seek him there, and that

the family should remain in close concealment till his intentions were proclaimed. In about a fortnight after their migration to Castle Muza, Alvar had completed the arrangements for his departure, and he then determined to announce it to Nina, whom he had spared as long as he could. For this purpose, he followed her into the wood in the evening; she had made her escape, as she generally did, when it was practicable; had wandered as far as she dared when by herself; and was sitting on the root of an elm which overhung the brook, watching the tawny light on bough and bank, which, as it touched the water, seemed to change the foam-beads round every stone into a necklace of rubies.

"Ah!" cried she, eagerly, making room for him beside her. "I have seen you so seldom to-day and yesterday. How glad I am that you are come!"

He took the place which she had assigned to him, and felt far more afraid of beginning his communication than had the pain been double, and restricted to himself alone.

"How have you passed the day?" he inquired, delaying the dreaded moment a little while.

"Oh! I forget *now*," answered she. "I only know that it is past, and that I am glad of it. I wish the next year were over."

"Why so, dear Nina? You should not hunt the moments away now; some day, perchance, you may wish to bring them back again."

"In a year," she replied, "I shall be a woman. Do not smile at me, or I will not talk to you any longer."

(Ah, Nina! have you found out that your silence is a punishment?) "I shall be fifteen. Oh! I wish it were come! I shall be free, and a queen! If I were not to be a queen, I should be very sorry that I was born a woman. A woman's life is sad, and tardy, and feeble; she can *do* nothing."

"And if you were a man, what would you *do?*" asked he, laughingly, spanning her tiny wrist, as she laid her hand, with an animated gesture, upon the hilt of his sword.

"You are mocking me," she answered, with half-assumed anger. "You pretend to think you are not happier than we are. Tell me, first, what *you* would do if you were a woman."

"I would seek to be what God made woman to be," he answered: "light, rest, comfort, beauty, to the life of others."

He paused on each word; and *saw* that they sank into her heart, though just now, in her childish coquetry, she would not show it.

"It sounds lovely," she said, grave for a moment; then shaking off the cloud and smiling in his face, she added, "but just think of all the hours of all the days. While you are out among the fields and woods—moving, working, *living*—we sit at home, and never cease that weary spinning, save when we go to that weary embroidery. Nay, I forgot, there *is* a little change: we learn to make broths, and compound simples; and we remain still a long, long time, while our maidens comb out our hair, and put fine clothes upon us. How should you like all this?"

"We are learning something else all this long, long time besides spinning and embroidery," answered he, returning her smile; "we are learning stillness, silence, and subjection, and all that is hereafter to bring us to a helpful and noble womanhood. And why should not our thoughts be as busy as our fingers, wandering away as far as we like, and weaving pleasant fancies?"

"Thoughts wandering!" she cried. "Ay, but the feet may long to wander too! I should like to see you tried in this life which you paint so fairly! How you would chafe, and fume, and pant, like your horse when you curb him tightly, making him tread a measure when he longs to be chasing a deer! I know you would make the most dreadful mistakes in your embroidery, and break the yarn ten times a minute while you were spinning. And as to the tiring-woman, let us see how much patience you have!"

She undid the long veil which confined her hair, and while the breeze loosened her bright tresses and scattered them about her face, she began to bind it upon his head, trying to smooth his perverse curls under its folds in feminine fashion. Laughing and half-ashamed, he let her do what she would with him.

"Am I not admirably patient?" he inquired; and then added very gravely—"But is not my beard in the way?"

The busy little hand was upon his mouth in an instant. "How dare you talk of such a thing?" she exclaimed indignantly. "You quite forget who you are. I wonder *what* Jacinta would think if *I* were to begin complaining *of my* beard!"

"I wonder what Jacinta would think if she were to see you making a toy of me in this manner! I wonder what I shall think of it myself to-morrow!"

These words were uttered in a low voice, and received no answer from the despotic tirewoman, except an authoritative "Do not murmur in that manner!"

"Must I not even have the control of my own voice?" pleaded he, laughing heartily. "What is the precise tone that your Majesty commands me to adopt?"

"You are learning stillness—and silence—and subjection," replied she, dwelling on each word with a saucy echo of his own emphasis. "I hope you find the lesson pleasant; I hope that it is doing you a great deal of good. "Ah!" (with a cry of dismay) "what are you doing?"

He had risen hastily to his feet and annihilated her handiwork in a moment. He gave her a bright glance, as though the predicament in which he stood was irresistibly amusing even to himself; and in truth there was something comic in the genuine expression of shame which passed over his bold and manly countenance as he beheld Dame Ermenberga approaching them. Fortunately she had not discovered their occupation, and Nina, who would have thought it unpardonable presumption in any mortal but herself to laugh at Alvar for an instant, never dreamed of betraying it. So, having been duly chidden for playing truant, they followed the stately lady to the supper-table.

And what became of Alvar's intention of breaking the news of his approaching departure to Nina? We only know that he stammered, with a sense of the first conscious untruth that he had ever told in his life, when he in-

formed his mother, in answer to her questions on the subject, that circumstances rendered it expedient for him to delay his journey for a day, and that he should not announce it to Nina till the morrow.

In Nina's mind, that brief description of the vocation of her coming womanhood—to be "light, rest, comfort, and beauty to the life of others"—remained vivid and eloquent, keeping her awake all night with a dream of the future. How pure she thought must that life be which is to be the light of another's—how terrible if such a light should itself become darkness! Then how true, and calm, and steadfast, must the heart be in which another heart is to find *rest! Rest!* She pondered on the word. "Ah!" thought she; "I see now the need and the nobleness of perfect truth; if there be but a shadow of falsehood in my soul, how can it give light and rest to another?" And grievous were it indeed should the heart lie down to rest in a poisoned atmosphere, which might lull it by polluting instead of purifying the springs of life. Then, too, comfort! "That thought is only bright," said Nina to herself: "there is nothing difficult in being always tender and kind; and how sweet it must be to give comfort!" And, as for beauty, it seemed natural to love beauty in all things; but how keen and unerring must one's own sense of beauty be if one is to bestow it upon the life of another! How must one's heart be exercised in the love of all things pure and lovely, till it discerns them by instinct, and imparts them without consciousness! And is there, perhaps, a false beauty which may first deceive oneself, and then be pernicious to others? If so, how dangerous must it be!

High thoughts, noble aspirations, earnest resolves, were burning in her young soul, consuming, as upon an altar, whatsoever there was of earthy, or base, or perishable, and perfuming the air with the ashes of the sacrifice. Only one thought troubled her in this future now opening before her. As the discipline and the happiness of womanhood were revealed to her, she began to feel also its helplessness. This life, whose glory and blessing was not to be in itself, but in the life of others, must it not, therefore, lie at the mercy of others? It might be free from stain, but who was to secure it from a wound? What, if she should encounter falsehood? What, if she must suffer wrong? There could be no remedy here, because the effort of a defence would be as painful as the effort of endurance, and the end of both must be bitterness of soul. For a moment she trembled, but only for a moment. Alvar could never wrong, never disappoint her. Beneath the shadow of his soul, hers might sleep securely, waking only to feel itself protected, and at peace.

Meantime, Alvar's thoughts were busy with unwonted self-reproach for unwonted weakness, nor did he rest till he believed that he was himself again. He did not exactly analyse what he had done, but turned away from it like one ashamed, and thought only of what he would do. So the next day, in a grave, sober, fatherly kind of manner, he began to explain the necessity of his departure to poor Nina, broke down in a moment and fell into extravagances of tenderness, as he saw the sudden anguish come into her astonished eyes, and, finally, so overwhelmed her

with pictures of his return, that she scarcely understood that he was going, till he was gone. He rode away in the evening, with full eyes, and a sore heart, and recovered self-respect: she remained behind, in a passion of tears, too intense for thought.

IX.

It is a month before we see Nina again; a weary and a bitter month, passed without any tidings of Alvar. And where and how do we find her? I am almost ashamed to say. She is lying asleep in the starlight, beneath a cluster of trees on the outskirts of the forest, many miles from Castle Muza. She looks pale and weary, and her garments are soiled and torn. A tall, stern-looking man, wearing a turban upon his head and a scimitar thrust through the shawl which girds his waist, is standing still and gazing upon her. He wonders how this fair and queenly child should be found alone at so late an hour, so far from human habitations. Alas! the mystery is easily explained. She has run away.

She bore her troubles as long and as patiently as she could, trying to consider them as discipline, and thinking of Alvar. But when the spirit is utterly unsubdued by its trial every moment is a struggle, and the end can only be submission or escape. Nina chose the latter alternative. She would not have chosen it, however, but for one unlucky incident. She had endured restraint, irksome tasks, cold kindness, absolute want of sympathy—forcible adaptation, in short, to a mould for which her nature should have been gradually fitted ere it was thrust

into it—with an endurance not very gracious or satisfactory to be sure, but still without any positive outbreak. One evening, however, she chanced to stand within the folds of the window-curtain, gazing upon the sky, when she heard Dame Ermenberga speaking of her to the good monk, who bore them company during Alvar's absence. Dame Ermenberga said that it was a heavy and she feared a hopeless charge—that Nina would never be fit to mix with those of her own station—and that she longed for the day when her training might be committed to other hands. Nina's proud heart swelled up in an instant, nor did she hear another word. For no fraction of time would she stay where she was indeed unwelcome and a burden. This could not be right; this Alvar would never ask of her. To him she would go. Ah! why had he not taken her with him? To him she would go. He was at Narbonne, she knew, and she thought she could easily find her way thither; he would take care of her, and assign her some home where her presence would not be looked upon as a torment and a misery. She hesitated not a moment, but obeying her impulse at once, and sure that she could justify herself to Alvar, climbed through the window, crossed the drawbridge ere it was closed for the night, and wandered away into the woods. That night she walked as far as she was able, and the next morning she could not have returned even had she wished to do so, for the way was irrecoverably lost. It is on the third night that we find her. Exhausted with fatigue, and with the scantiness of her fare of roots and berries—frightened out of her senses, and almost hopeless—she

had at last sobbed herself to sleep. When she awoke she was in a curtained litter, moving rapidly onwards.

She raised herself on her elbow, separated the drapery with her hand, and looked timidly out. It was broad daylight. She found that she was carried upon the shoulders of men whose dress and aspect were altogether strange to her —several others similarly attired, and carrying long spears, whose barbs glittered in the sun, rode on horseback on either side, and amongst these was one distinguished by a richer dress than the rest, and by a peculiarly severe and stately countenance. This personage approached her as soon as her face was visible between the curtains of the litter. Quietly, but without unkindness, he disengaged her hand, and caused her to withdraw within the covering, saying at the same time, slowly, and with the accent of one who speaks a language not entirely familiar to him, "Do not be afraid. You are quite safe. I am taking you home."

Nina drew back, a little reassured. She was rather bewildered than terrified. There was something so tranquil and so strong in the aspect of him who had addressed her, that it recalled the image of Alvar, and produced a vague sense of safety. She wondered what was meant by "taking her home." If Castle Muza were the object of their journey—and Nina saw no improbability in this idea, for the conjectures of inexperience are like the sequences of thought in a dream, and dispense with all natural and intelligible connection of cause and effect—it was at any rate better than hopelessly wandering through the forest. Besides, it seemed to her that she had been

roaming about a long while, and she hoped that the hour of Alvar's return might be near. And if "home" signified the home of the unknown leader of the cavalcade, there might be a little delay in restoring her to Alvar, but she did not anticipate anything worse. She would say who she was and where she wished to go, and as the stranger could have no possible motive for detaining her, she would doubtless be allowed to depart, and assisted on her journey. Reasoning thus with herself, Nina, though somewhat uneasy and alarmed, was by no means in despair; and when she found that a bottle of milk, and a plate containing bread and dried meat, had been placed within the litter for her use, she accepted them as a sign that she had fallen into good hands, and partook heartily of the much needed refreshment.

The journey was long and very tedious; Nina could not tell how many days and nights it lasted. She became more anxious as the time advanced, and frequently wept from vexation, from fear, or from mere weariness. But she could do nothing. If she appealed to her bearers, they only shook their heads and placed their fingers upon their lips; and she had never but one opportunity of again addressing the leader, who disappeared from her presence so completely that she fancied at first he had left the party. This solitary opportunity occurred after some days, when, in a paroxysm of grief and fear, she was pleading with the attendants, and beseeching them to set her at liberty, or at least to let her know where they were taking her. Suddenly, as if he had started from the earth, the chief was at her side. "Child, be silent!"

cried he, with flashing eyes, and a terrible voice; "be silent, lest evil befall thee!" He went as he had come, and Nina felt her heart die within her, and ventured upon no further inquiries.

At length, after she had fallen into a state of languor and apathy, feeling as though neither help nor change could ever reach her, she became suddenly aware that the ground had begun to give forth a new and quite unfamiliar sound beneath the feet of her bearers. It seemed neither turf nor road; it was a sound which she had never heard before, save when Alvar's courser crossed the drawbridge of Castle Muza. She was sensible, moreover, that many feet besides those of her companions were passing to and fro; and there was a hum of voices in her ears which confused and astonished her. Once more she looked forth, this time making the aperture so small that it was well-nigh imperceptible from without. She saw a paved road, shut in by lines of wall and window, and wide, parapeted roofs, over which towered many a stately dome and slender minaret. As she looked, the cavalcade was passing from the street into a spacious square, where, sitting upon carpets, or standing in open temporary booths, or in the lowest stories of the houses also quite open to the air, a multitude of persons, all turbaned and gaily attired, were exposing sundry articles for sale. The splendour of many of the wares, which consisted of rich shawls, gorgeous tapestries, and weapons hilted with gold, and adorned with precious stones; the dark aspects and bright garments of the traders, and, more than all, *their* numbers; the aërial and unreal character of the ar-

chitecture, which seemed just such a fabric as an enchanter might build in a summer's night, and sweep away with his wand in the morning: all these combined to dazzle and amaze poor Nina, paralysing her powers of thought, and almost depriving her of perception. She dropped her guardian curtain as she found herself entering beneath the shadow of an arched doorway, made a desperate effort to collect her ideas, put up a hasty prayer, and feeling that she had now reached her destination, determined to be calm, cool, and observant, and to suffer no opportunity of improving her situation to escape.

The litter was placed upon the ground, and two attendants immediately undid the curtains, placed their hands beneath Nina's shoulders, lifted her out, and, still maintaining an unbroken silence, set her upon the pavement beside it, and left her. She wrapped her veil about her head, and looked around her, trembling. The scene which she beheld was indeed more like a vision or a fable than a reality.

She stood in a large court, paved with variegated marbles, and surrounded by a kind of cloister, whose fantastic but graceful arches rose from pillars so slender that they would have seemed painfully insecure but for the lightness and delicacy of the superstructure which they sustained. The walls were carved into quaint arabesques, and inlaid with rich mosaics, both above and within the cloistered arcade; at several points they opened, showing new arched and pillared ways to courts or chambers beyond; and as every reed-like column was twisted into some fresh shape, or adorned with some new device out

of the very wantonness of the artist's invention, the eye strove in vain to thread their tempting mazes, and passing from one to another, paused, returned, and resumed its course till it grew dizzy with wonder and delight. You were reminded of the fancies of a musical improvisatore who decorates every note of the melody which he has taken for his subject, till the ear can scarcely keep pace with him; or of the art of a skilful jeweller who encloses each separate gem in a setting as curious and minute as it is beautiful.*

In the centre of this marvellous court—thus enriched with every variety of form which a fearless and abundant imagination could suggest—thus palpitating with light and colour from tinted marbles and gay mosaics, and vases of full-blossomed flowers ranged around—thus garmented in transparent fretworks where stone counterfeited the fine creations of the needle—in the centre stood a fountain which was perhaps the greatest wonder of the whole scene. It consisted of a tall stem of black marble, supported by a vase of the same material, shaped like a huge lotus-blossom; and from this vase a stream, not of water, but of glittering quicksilver, was perpetually playing into a basin, which received it and conducted it by a concealed pipe back to the original stem, so that the silver flow of

* It is asserted by the chroniclers of the time that this palace, built by Abderahman the Great, in his own city of Medina-Azhara, was supported by more than four thousand pillars of variegated marble. The whole description of the place, with its matchless fountains and its pavilions of marble and gold, reads like a page out of the Arabian tales. Abderahman was the first of his dynasty who ventured to assume the title of Caliph, and among all the rulers of Moorish Spain none approached him in magnificence.

radiance never ceased. Two men were standing beside this singular fountain engaged in conversation, and their swarthy complexions, and picturesque Eastern costume—chiefly white, but relieved by the scarlet, blue, and amber tints of the shawls which bound their waists—harmonized, in a very remarkable manner, with the general effect of the scene.

While Nina watched these persons, she saw them break off their conversation and prostrate themselves on the ground, as if in acknowledgment of the appearance of some superior being. Looking up, she perceived that a door in the wall opposite to her had been thrown open, and that the leader of the cavalcade, issuing from it, was advancing across the court to the spot on which she stood, conducting—or, as it seemed from his bearing and gestures, attending upon—another individual.

The stranger was a man verging upon middle age, though still in what may be called the prime of life. He was tall and slightly built, and his features, almost feminine in the delicacy of their proportions and outline, were redeemed from effeminacy by the sharpness with which they were cut, by the dark hue of complexion and moustache, and by the fire of a pair of black flashing eyes, whose fixed gaze few could abide without emotion. He moved easily and proudly—not noticing even by a glance the obsequious obeisance of his inferiors—and there was a kind of superb indolence both in his face and figure, which seemed the best safeguard against a too-frequent kindling of the flame which evidently smouldered within. He approached Nina, who, leaning upon the base of one

of the columns for support, was quivering in every limb; he removed her veil without the slightest ceremony, and examined her features for a few moments in silence, with a quiet critical expression which gradually brightened into satisfaction.

Touching her slightly upon the shoulder, he bade her follow him, and then moved away, without so much as a glance to ascertain that she was obeying; it seemed as though he expected his word to work like a physical cause, and produce its effect irresistibly. Nina could never have found strength to comply had not the conductor of her journey—whom in utter helplessness she looked upon as a friend, because she had seen him before—whispered in her ear the cheering words, "Go, and fear nothing!"

Thus encouraged, she did as she was commanded.

The Caliph—for he was in truth no less a personage, though his title as such was not half so familiar to his Christian contemporaries as it would be to an English damsel of the present day well versed in the Arabian Nights, could she be led backward through the centuries into his presence—the Caliph led the way through the door of which we have before spoken into a pleasure-garden of great beauty and extent, which surrounded three sides of the palace, and was kept in the most exquisite order. Rapidly threading the paths, amid flowers of a thousand hues and odours, he advanced to a low turfen platform in the centre, on which stood a pavilion, constructed entirely of spotless white marble, resting upon a multitude of pillars of the same beautiful material, and ornamented with golden arabesques. Lines, or cords of

gold, twining around the columns, and gathered into festoons at regular intervals around the frieze and pinnacles, seemed to bind together the various members of the sumptuous little edifice, which was crowned by a cupola and miniature spire, also gilded.

The Caliph ascended an easy flight of marble steps leading to the portal, which was flanked on either side by the motionless figure of a slave, sable and silent, and clothed in white garments which seemed positively to glitter by their contrast with the ebon hue of face and limb. He raised a silken curtain, heavy with embroidery, which supplied the place of a door, and passing within, motioned to Nina, who was following him, to remain outside till he summoned her. Nina stood still, as she was directed, but did not fail to look through the interstice between the curtain and the arch from which it hung. A large screen stood inside, and was intended as a second and more impervious veil, but the Caliph had moved it as he entered, and she could both see and hear what passed in the chamber beyond.

The magnificence of this apartment corresponded with that of the building which contained it. It was hung with the most gorgeous tapestries, and its carpets, soft as down to the foot, were jewelled with a thousand prisms of colour. An alabaster lamp, adorned with agates and lapis lazuli, was suspended from the ceiling, and beneath it stood a table—that celebrated table which, two hundred years before, well-nigh cost the ambitious Muza his life—composed entirely of emeralds. Beside the table, on a pile of rich cushions and carpets, reclined a beautiful woman—the only *tenant of* the chamber.

She seemed to be about three or four and twenty years old; her face and figure were absolutely faultless; her dress, made in that same graceful Eastern fashion with which Nina was now becoming familiar, was of the richest materials; and her dark hair was confined by a long veil of silver gauze which flowed almost to her feet, partially shrouding her form, but leaving the exquisite features uncovered. Such an expression of lassitude and dejection Nina had never seen before, nor had she yet learned that the human countenance was capable of telling so sad a story. The delicate fingers lay unconscious and relaxed upon a lute which was on the cushion beside her; the downcast head drooped as if, small and finely-moulded though it was, it were yet too heavy for the slender neck which sustained it; the deep, dark, pathetic eyes gazed listlessly and vacantly from under their half-fallen lids upon a spot in the carpet, evidently not perceiving that on which they gazed—every limb seemed instinct with a kind of weary restlessness—it was a perfect image of sorrow without hope and without help.

"Amine!" said the Caliph, as he entered and stood before her.

The lady lifted her head, and her face was transformed in an instant, as though she were some lovely statue which had received life from the word. Light came to her eyes, colour to her cheeks, a smile to her lips, a glory to her whole aspect. There was no need to speak the welcome which her entire being thus eloquently expressed.

"Amine!" said the Caliph, stooping over her with a kind of lordly indulgence, as if she fulfilled her office in

creation by worshipping him, and he might as well acknowledge that she had done so. "Amine, I have brought you a present. Almudafar has found me a Christian maiden, and brought her to be your servant."

He spoke in Nina's language, but she could not distinguish the words of the lady's murmured answer. Apparently it conveyed her acceptance; for, the next instant, the Caliph slightly raised his voice and commanded the captive to enter.

She stepped within the screen, and stood timidly before them. The lady did not notice her even by a glance; she had eyes, ears, senses, for one object only, and she seemed a very prodigal of her powers, as though she knew that not for long would they possess this object whereon to lavish themselves. Nor was she mistaken. After sitting for a few moments beside her upon the cushions,—after trifling with the flower she wore, and exchanging with her a few more speeches in accents well-nigh as low and musical as her own, but now in a language which Nina did not understand,—he rose and went away with the bearing, half magnificent, half nonchalant, which seemed habitual to him. As he passed his poor trembling captive, he laid his hand upon her head, and, looking her in the face with no harsh expression, said, as he pointed to Amine,—

"Child, there is your mistress. Be obedient and serve her well."

Nina could not but observe the lady's manner as he left her. When he first rose, her hand, which lay upon his arm, closed around it with a convulsive movement, and

she seemed about to rise also, while a passionate, imploring expression came into her eyes, which, once seen, could never be forgotten. This did not last an instant. She sank back upon the cushions with a scarcely audible sigh, and seemed to fade visibly away as he withdrew; by the time that the curtain had dropped behind him, she was once more the same pallid, woeful, motionless statue that Nina had beheld when she first looked into the chamber.

After a short silence, just as Nina was summoning courage to speak for herself, the lady addressed her, but without looking up.

"Come hither, maiden," said she, in a faint, melancholy voice of inexpressible sweetness. "Sit down beside me and fear nothing. Tell me who thou art, and whence thou comest, and speak as to a friend."

Out burst the torrent of long-repressed fears, hopes, longings, and sorrows, set free by these gentle words. Nina did not sit, she cast herself upon her knees beside the lady, and, eagerly clasping her hands, said, as fast and as clearly as a shower of sudden tears would allow her,—

"Oh, lady! you are kind, and you speak tenderly! Oh! have pity upon me, and send me home. My name is Nina, and I am a princess among the Christians, and I must never be a slave among the Moors. Send me home to the noble Alvar—you must have heard his name. He is called Alvar the True, after his father; and he is my guardian and my friend; and he is the noblest knight in all the world; and, alas! alas! I have sinned so deeply in leaving the home where he left me, that I do not deserve to return to it. But he will forgive me; and you,

lady, you are surely kind and gentle. Oh! do not, do not suffer me to be kept here!"

The hand which Nina grasped seemed very cold and still. Involuntarily she looked in the lady's face. Amine had fainted, and was lying insensible on the cushions.

Nina uttered a scream of terror, and in an instant the room seemed to be filled with attendants. They gathered about Amine, flung scented water in her face, applied essences to her nose, and by the use of a multitude of restoratives, at length recalled her to life. Till she unclosed her eyes, they had no leisure to think of Nina, and they were then about to thrust her somewhat rudely from the apartment, but Amine, by a gesture, forbade them.

Nina understood what passed very imperfectly, for the language in which they spoke was unknown to her; but she discerned, after a time, that Amine was about to undress and retire to rest. It was evening, and Nina, who was herself completely exhausted by all the various emotions she had undergone, was not sorry when one of the attendants beckoned her into an inner apartment, and, pointing to a small couch beside the richly-canopied bed prepared for the lady, made her understand that this was to be her place of repose. In a little while Amine herself was supported, or rather borne in, and deposited upon the cushions.

Stretching out one languid hand, she drew Nina to her side, but did not speak till the domestics, having officiously busied themselves about her for a time, and ascertained her pleasure, had withdrawn, casting no favourable looks upon the fair interloper who was thus chosen to be the companion of their mistress's privacy.

Then Amine spoke, in a low broken voice, still keeping her hand upon Nina's shoulder. "Sleep, dear child," said she, "and fear no danger. I am your friend. I will serve you and protect you, and send you back at last where you wish to be. Only be patient. Say nothing, not even to me, till I speak to you first. Be patient, and trust me."

She took Nina's face between her hands, as though she would have kissed her, but, changing in a moment, bowed her head, and suddenly kissed the child's hand. Then she turned away, and hid her face in the pillows.

Nina lay down, bewildered, but greatly comforted. She was so weary that she soon fell asleep, though somewhat disturbed by a low sound of sobbing from the sumptuous couch by her side. Whenever she awaked in the night, she heard that same low irregular sound of sobs, which seemed to be as continuous and ceaseless as the moments. It haunted her dreams, filling them with images of some deep amazing woe which she could not fathom, and so touching her heart with pity, that it became scarcely capable of grief or fear for itself.

X.

Nina's existence was now rather like a picture exhibited for the contemplation than a scene in which she was moving and acting; she seemed to have no part in her own life. Ignorant of the language which those around her usually spoke, she was like a deaf person, understanding only such words—and these were but few—as were specifically addressed to herself; and she relapsed gradually

into that habitual silence which had been the training of her childhood. Ever active-minded, even in the midst of her present bitter and perpetual sorrow, she became an adept in interpreting gestures, and gathering a meaning out of such minute outward signs and indications as would escape an ordinary observer; and many a web of rare texture did her fancy weave with these fine threads. Materials were not wanting. In all that surrounded her there was at once a mystery and a splendour which could not fail to stimulate the imagination in the highest possible degree; while of it all she understood just so much as might amount to the stating of a riddle, which leaves the mind to pursue an unintermitted course of guesses till the key is found, or the search abandoned in despair.

The lady Amine was the object on which her curiosity and her interest chiefly centred; and here imagination was baffled, for its utmost efforts availed not to penetrate the secret which was withering the life of this most lovely and most miserable woman. Nina saw very little of her after that first evening, but continued to look upon her as a protectress, and recognized her influence in a thousand gracious forms, rendering the position of the poor captive as tolerable as outward ameliorations could make it. Whether spontaneously or by compulsion, Amine avoided all personal intercourse with her, nor did Nina ever again share her chamber, and listen in wonder and pity to the low sobs of a troubled heart, making night eloquent with human sorrow.

A word in passing,—generally an injunction to be patient and to cherish hope, sometimes responded to by Nina

with a tearful "How soon?"—this comprised the whole of their direct communication with each other. Once she drew Nina suddenly to her, as on that first evening, and said, "You must tell me your history;" but when Nina was about to comply, Amine shrank back, crying, while her face contracted with an expression of horror, "Not now! not now! Some other time!"

The time never came, and Amine continued to know no more of her beautiful slave than she had learned in those few broken words which preceded her swoon.

This mixture of neglect and surveillance on the part of the mistress produced the happiest effect on the demeanour of the servants. Nina ceased to be an object of jealousy, and became one of interest. In fact, she was a kind of pet in the harem, and might have been happy, but for constant recollections and ceaseless longings. The women speedily discerned that kindness shown towards her was the surest method of propitiating their mistress; and as she displaced no favourite, and interfered with no right,—moreover as she was so beautiful, and in her present state of dejection so docile a creature,—they felt no difficulty in showing it. She was allowed as much liberty as was consistent with the customs of the people amongst whom she lived.

In that part of the gardens which adjoined the pavilion, and which was separated from the rest by a thick belt of flowering shrubs enclosed within a high fence, she might wander as long as she liked; and here some of her least painful hours were spent. Within doors, she escaped as much as possible from the tedium of the bath and the

toilet,—the main business of a harem life,—and she endured the burden of embroidery, which she now saw to be inseparable from the existence of woman, as patiently as she could. Here, too, she was introduced to a new pleasure, which, even in her grief, she could not but appreciate. She was taught to play upon the lute.

So soon as Amine—who, in spite of her apathy, seemed to possess an instinctive perception of everything that affected Nina—discovered her delight in this occupation, it was assigned to her as a daily task, and it became her chief pursuit.

The women, who thought that they had now penetrated their mistress's design, and supposed that the new slave was to be trained as a musician, were zealous in imparting as much as they knew themselves, and careful not to interrupt the hours which Nina spent in playing and singing. It was a relief to them to find that she was intended for some definite office, as their mistress's repugnance to receive any personal service from her had puzzled them not a little, and they were unable to reconcile it with the substantial indulgence exhibited towards her. If they brought Nina with them to attend at the bath, or in the tiring-chamber, the lady would not even take a kerchief or an essence-bottle from her hands, but invariably called one of the other women by name, and demanded of her the article required, though Nina was, perhaps, holding it before her eyes. If she approached with a vase of sherbet, or a bouquet of flowers, Amine, though she had asked for it but the moment before, would wave her away, and perhaps require it of another the moment afterwards.

The merest whims of a despot are law, and Amine's pleasure in the matter was never questioned, though the fair populace who served her were very thankful when it became intelligible. They were so accustomed to the sorrowful and speechless languor in which their lovely mistress passed her days, save during certain brief intervals of a light and life almost too intense to be joyful, that they would never have dreamed of intruding upon her by any spontaneous remark or inquiry.

And so month after month wore away without any sensible change, and Nina seemed to be no nearer the end of her gentle and gorgeous imprisonment than she was when it commenced.

She was thoroughly miserable, yet she never abandoned hope; in fact, the very intensity of unsatisfied hope was wearing out her young life. She believed with her whole soul in Amine's power and willingness to serve her; she clung to her few mysterious words of encouragement as a man might cling to the slenderest root on the edge of a precipice, when, frail though it be, it is the one only support that saves him from the abyss; she hoarded them in the depths of her heart, and lived upon them because she had nothing else to live upon. Every morning she awoke with the eager, anxious thought, "To-day it will be!" each successive hour prolonged and deepened her disappointment; and with the evening came a sinking as of despair, only to preclude the renewed hope and burning expectancy of the morrow. She grew pale, and those bright spiritual eyes of hers lost their light of peace—lost the sweet, wondering childishness, which had been such a

charm, and acquired a wistful, seeking look, a look into the future, as though there were nothing in the present on which they could bear to dwell, which was unspeakably pathetic. The lapse of time, so far from teaching her forgetfulness, seemed but to deepen the touches and elaborate the details of memory. So often, nay, so incessantly, did her thoughts retrace every hour of her intercourse with Alvar, that the idea became a history in her mind, in which every look of his was an incident, and every word an epoch; her constant search was rewarded by the discovery of many a minute trifle, many a passing moment, which had at first eluded her recollection, but which was now caught up and treasured as a priceless jewel; and after one slow year had glided away, she could have produced a narrative of the past, enriched by a thousand particulars of which she had scarcely been conscious while they were present to her. Each scene became a separate picture, which she would call up and contemplate with strange enjoyment, almost believing it to be reality, till, on a sudden, she would become aware that she was gazing only upon vacancy, and then she would break into tender and passionate weeping. Those remembered words and looks, too, became to her more than the food of memory, they became the rule of life. What light had ever dawned upon her neglected though innocent soul, except from him?—what had she to walk by now, except the memory of his guidance? Each word was an oracle which she now duteously observed and obeyed: and the only sensation approaching happiness of which she was capable, accompanied the thought that she

was framing her life and moulding her character as he would approve. For this she restrained her impetuous temper, and subdued her proud spirit, trying anxiously to learn gentleness, as a lesson which she might be able to say perfectly to him when they should meet again; for this she watched her words and thoughts, testing them perpetually by that idea of womanhood which he had presented to her; by this law she judged the past, condemning so utterly the unbridled impatience which had brought her into her present suffering, that she could not but submit to its consequences, as to a punishment which she had deserved. Even her brief and simple prayers were uttered slowly, her voice unconsciously following all the while the accents which had been wont to lead it so patiently. Thus she was never alone in spirit for a moment; but oh! how hard and how bitter was her actual loneliness! Often, when she wandered about the gardens, or sat unnoticed on the steps of the pavilion—often would she wring her hands and plead, aloud and in tears, for forgiveness and restoration. Often would she wonder where he was seeking her at that moment, and grieving that he could not find her. So perfect was her confidence in his tenderness, that the possibility of his abandoning her never once crossed her thoughts. She thought that he might be angry, she longed to be assured of his pardon; but she felt as certain of his affection as though he were present, expressing it to her with those unchangeable eyes and that unforgotten voice. She needed no tidings to tell her that he was searching for her through the world.

In this picture-life of hers, Amine was, as we have

said, the principal figure. Nina could glean but little concerning her from the women of the harem; that little, however, served to stimulate her curiosity. She learned that Amine had been the wife of the great Abderahman for two years, and that for her sake he had departed from the customs of his people and dismissed all her rivals.

"He had taken a wife," said they, "as the Christians do."

There were rumours also of some strange ceremony, insisted upon by the lady ere she would consent to share his throne; and Nina was asking eagerly for the particulars, and inquiring after Amine's name and nation, when the girl who had hitherto been her informant, was sharply checked by an elder woman, and bidden to hold her peace and tell the Christian slave nothing further. After this Nina could obtain no more intelligence, and finding her questions useless she ceased to propose them.

Whatever the nature of the burning grief might be which lay in the heart of the unfortunate Amine, its outward effects became daily more and more perceptible. It was visibly consuming her life, and changing though it could not destroy her beauty. Each week Nina fancied that she could perceive a more ivory paleness in the brow, a more transparent hectic in the cheeks; while, as the flesh wasted and the features fell, the eyes acquired a kind of unnatural and deadly splendour fearful to look upon. Yet, dejected and suffering though she evidently was, she endured with patience all the labours of her maidens in decorating her person, never curtailing nor hurrying them, how tedious soever they might be. She

seemed to watch her beauty more anxiously than she watched her life, and to tremble lest the one should depart before the other.

One day Nina was struck with a singular change in her aspect; the dull lifeless apathy which possessed her at all times, save when in the presence of her lord, had passed away, and in its stead there was a fitful, feverish uneasiness. She glanced anxiously about her—she started and seemed ready to spring from her seat at every sound—while her hands were nervously restless, undoing or readjusting the work of her tirewoman, or closing and reclosing upon each other, as though absolute stillness were impossible. Never had she seemed so hard to satisfy; her vest, her veil, her turban, were repeatedly changed, and the slave whose business it was to braid her magnificent dark tresses had to cease and recommence her graceful task more than once ere the approbation of her mistress was attained. At last the toilet was over, and she came forth into her outer chamber complete in triumphant beauty. Scarcely had she crossed the threshold ere the curtain was lifted and the Caliph entered.

The attendants withdrew at a sign, but as they quitted the room Nina could see that Amine, after standing for an instant with downcast eyes and heaving breast, had sprung forward and cast herself at her husband's feet without once glancing at his face, as if she feared that her supplication might be checked ere she had power to utter it. Nina remained in the adjoining chamber, and though her heart was full of vague pity and sympathy, her thoughts chiefly centred in the hope that her own des-

tiny might perchance be the subject on which Amine was pleading with her lord. In half an hour the Caliph clapped his hands, and Nina was the first to answer the summons. As she entered, he was retiring through the opposite doorway. He returned for a moment, and addressing Nina said, "Your mistress is ill—attend to her!"—then paused, and fixing a strange look upon Amine, who lay upon the cushions exhausted and with her face bathed in tears, he added the unintelligible words, "Light of mine eyes, decide at thine own pleasure—but forget not, if it be so, we must part!" She made a gesture as though she would have detained him, but he was gone, and Nina, kneeling beside Amine, supported her head and vainly endeavoured to soothe her. Her paroxysm was fearful, but so soon as she began to recover consciousness and power, she pushed Nina from her, saying in an agitated voice, "Do not touch me! Shrink from me! Earth holds not so great a sinner as I am!" She then sat up, and drawing from her bosom a sapphire ring which Nina instantly recognised as the Caliph's signet, contemplated it fixedly. Once or twice she seemed as though she would have replaced it in her bosom, but the movement was tremulous and uncertain, and without effect. As she sat there, with a wild unfathomable look in her burning eyes which clung to the gem as if by force, a strange notion came into Nina's mind, and she looked on her fearfully, as on one possessed by an evil spirit, and longed to snatch away the ring, as if the spell would be broken by her doing so. And in truth there was at that moment a terrible struggle between the good and evil in her breast. At last she

rose up suddenly with a majestic air, and giving Nina the ring, bade her wait for the Caliph by the garden-gate, and deliver it to him as he passed. She withdrew into the inner chamber without another word, and Nina felt, she knew not why, that the evil had conquered.

She did as she had been commanded, and had not waited long beside the gate ere the Caliph stalked by, with his wonted air of splendid indifference. He started a little when he caught sight of Nina's veiled figure, and, approaching the gate, held out his hand to her, and asked, with a carelessness which seemed to be half-assumed, "Hast thou an errand to me?" Nina gave him the ring, and saw a proud and satisfied smile steal on his lofty countenance as he moved away.

She lingered for a time, musing upon this mysterious incident, and wondering whether she had indeed been unconsciously helping to decide some crisis in her own fortunes. This idea persisted in obtruding itself upon her, though there were no ostensible grounds for it. Gradually she yielded to one of those vague reveries into which thoughts which have no welcome object whereon to fix and dwell are so apt to wander till they lose themselves, and lose also for a little while the distinct consciousness of sorrow. More than that year for the close of which she had childishly longed was gone. She had crossed the first verge of womanhood. What a life was before her! She tried to call up some one of those pictures of the Past, or to busy herself with some of those imaginings of the Future which had so often engaged and beguiled her. In vain! They were losing their power to occupy her mind:

frequent repetition had so proved their unreality, that she turned from them with unconquerable distaste. Hope was sick and ready to die; faith—not in Alvar's truth, but in his power—was failing; patience was not in poor Nina's character, and she could only pray for it, and weep weary tears because she had such need of it. Faith in Amine was entirely gone. It was in absolute desperation that Nina at last determined to appeal to the Caliph himself. Though he was a Moor, he was a man; and if he could but know of how grievous a crime he was guilty in detaining her, surely he would let her go. She resolved to speak at once, without regard to time, or place, or witnesses; the very next time he came to the pavilion she would cast herself down at his feet and tell him all. Fancy drew before her the picture of his stern eye and scornful lip, but she did not shrink. What evil could he work against her worse than that which she now endured? For a moment she shuddered, remembering certain dark tales of the vengeance which his absolute power inflicted upon such as incurred his displeasure—vengeance so sure, so swift, so fatal, that it counterfeited the immediate judgment of Deity. There had been a stain on the pavilion stair one morning, and Nina had passed the spot with hasty tread and averted eye ever since, though it was cleansed within the hour. There some guilty slave had stood before his master, and the avenging scimitar had swept his head from his shoulders at a stroke. But Nina quailed not for this. She gathered up her young strength, and besought God's help, and determined within her own mind that death, however terrible for the moment, was in itself

preferable to such a life as that before her. Moreover, she remembered that God was a tender Father, and she did not believe that he would suffer her to perish in this manner.

There was more peace in her mind after her resolution was formed, and her thoughts roamed away again, and began to contrast her lonely prison-life on San Pablo, with the days which she was now passing, in which her solitude seemed tenfold deeper, and her chains heavier and more galling. "Alas!" she thought, "it is because of the liberty and companionship between! If a summer noon were set between two starless midnights, what marvel that the second darkness should seem more terrible than the first?" Then she asked herself that common question of the bereaved, "Would she, if she could, resign the memory of her happiness, and so draw the sting out of her present sorrow?" and answered herself with the invariable "No! that memory is all the treasure now left to the heart!" and closed with the feeling which ever follows that question and that answer—that the bitterness of regret is not a whit the less bitter when it is proved to be unreasonable.

Her eye fell upon a cluster of roses, reminding her at once of those which had grown near her mountain home when she was but an infant, and of a wild festoon upon the walls of Castle Muza. "Ah," thought she, "flowers are happy everywhere! Who knows from what far region the root was brought which carries such a crown of joyous blossoms here? I almost wish I were a flower!"

A low, soft sigh near her reminded her that she had

unconsciously spoken aloud; and looking up, she beheld a man leaning upon the gate, and looking at her. When he perceived that her attention was caught, he leaned further over; and, addressing her in a very low tone, he said, in her own language, "Lady, in one thing, at least, the flowers have no better fortune than thyself. Wheresoever they are planted they must abide, till some friendly hand remove them. Would yonder rose die, think you, if I were to uproot it and carry it to the Royal Garden at Barcelona?"

Nina's heart leaped up with a sudden hope, and she drew near and gazed fixedly upon the stranger. He was a man of middle age, and wore the dress of a travelling merchant. He met her gaze frankly, and smiled in answer, as if to encourage her; but there was a sinister look in his eye, an unsafe expression about his mouth, which repelled her, in spite of his assumed benignity. She clasped her hands upon her breast, and gazed at him as if she would have read his soul. Still smiling, he thrust his hand into his vest, and drew forth a silver clasp set with emeralds, which he held up before her. She recognised in an instant a gem which Alvar was wont to wear: it was the clasp of his gorget! Every shadow of doubt passed away, and her face became at once radiant, not with hope, but with joy.

"Will you trust this token?" asked the unknown.

"Yes," replied Nina, weeping and covering her face; "with my life."

"Trust also the bearer of it," rejoined the stranger, "and your escape is certain. Can you meet me here to-morrow night, three hours later than this?"

"I will come," answered the girl breathlessly.

"Do not fail," said he, "and I, on my part, will not fail to lead you to him who owns this gem, and who bade me show it to you. Now adieu, fair lady; God be with you! there is danger in our conference."

He was moving away, but she eagerly detained him.

"One word—one word, I beseech you!" she cried. "Why comes he not himself?"

"He is known here, and he dares not," was the prompt reply. "Be of good courage, and forget not the hour."

He was gone, and Nina stood still, trying to compose herself. Her heart was wondrously heavy, and seemed to be sinking deeper and deeper every moment; she had never felt so near despair. She felt as if life must needs ebb away ere the appointed hour could arrive—as if it was actually and sensibly leaving her at that very moment. She could not rouse herself to hope at first, and when, after awhile, her sanguine nature began to assert itself, it woke a fever in her blood, which left her no rest in mind or body. She knew not how the hours went from her, but they seemed to scorch her as they passed. Whether for good or for evil, however, they *did* pass; they glided on heavily and unconsciously, and bore her, at length, to the very moment for which she was waiting.

It was an hour after the inhabitants of the pavilion had retired to rest, and the two women who shared Nina's apartment were sleeping soundly. She rose noiselessly, replaced the garments which she had laid aside as usual that she might avoid suspicion, and stole from the room. To any but herself escape might have been very difficult,

if not impossible; for those dark and speechless warders stood ever by the portal by night as by day. But Nina's island training had familiarized her with many a feat, the mere spectacle of which would have terrified those idle Eastern women, and she entertained no doubt of her power to accomplish a descent from the window of the chamber in which she had first beheld Amine. She glided along the passage and entered it. All was still. A single silver lamp diffused an imperfect twilight through the room, and the dim lustre glimmered strangely upon a confusion of gorgeous hues and superb adornments, and showed the prostrate figure of a female slave, who slept on the threshold of her mistress's chamber. Nina trembled as she passed her, nor could she help pausing as a faint sound from that inner room, penetrating the folds of the rich curtain which shrouded the doorway, reached her ears. She listened; it was a low pathetic sound, rather a groan than a sigh. And there was a silence, and then it came again—a faint, broken, miserable murmur—the cry of a perishing heart. Long did it haunt Nina's ears; often did the remembrance of it force the bitter drops from her eyes. She never thought to hear Amine's voice again!

She reached the window, unclosed it, and descended fearlessly and rapidly. The capital of one of the shafts by which the lower story of the pavilion was sustained afforded her an easy resting-place; the twisted stem enabled her to reach the ground. She flew to the gate; but though it was some minutes later than the appointed hour, no one was waiting to receive her.

XI.

Nina waited a slow and weary hour beside the gate, and began sorrowfully to admit the idea that she was to be disappointed. The despair which accompanied this feeling proved that her previous hope had been far stronger than she was herself aware. She closed her eyes, which ached with her fixed and fruitless gazing, and asked herself what was to be done. She must return; she must give it up for the present; she must await patiently some further communication or explanation. There was no help. She was too utterly dejected to attempt a conjecture as to the cause of the stranger's non-appearance. She left the fact where it was; hope was over; that was all she knew, and she could not even summon spirit enough to renew her resolution of pleading with the Caliph. She felt a strange, unreasonable inclination to remain where she was all night, and let them put what interpretation they liked upon it when they should find her in the morning. Let them know—let them all know that she was utterly miserable; that she had become desperate; that she thought only of escape, and, if escape could not be accomplished except by death, that she would welcome that only liberator as a good angel. Why should she conceal it any longer?

Suddenly a footstep struck upon her ear. Nina started up, but, ere she had sprung out of the olive-trees, she perceived that two persons were approaching the gate. She drew back, and, concealing herself once more, watched them losely. They walked quickly forward, and entered

the garden of the pavilion. They passed close beside the spot where Nina was hidden, and one turned his face towards her. It was the Caliph himself.

Nina shrank and trembled, remembering (oh, how bitterly!) that once before she had thus hidden from a tyrant master, but then there was an arm to sustain her, and a voice to whisper comfort.

They were in deep conversation, but spoke so low that Nina, till they were actually passing her, could not distinguish what they said. The first words which she caught were uttered by the Caliph.

"By the tomb of the Prophet!" cried he, with animation, "I will keep faith with you."

"If I believed you not, I should not be here," answered the other.

He spoke very softly, but the first syllable of that voice would have been enough for Nina. With a scream of rapture she bounded forward and cast herself she knew not where—at his feet—upon his heart. Ere she lost her senses, she had seen that the astonished face bent down to her was Alvar's, and that his arm caught her as the sudden stroke of her amazing joy smote her down like lightning.

When Nina recovered, the same true eyes were still gazing upon hers, and the first look poured light and peace into her soul. A flow of soft and happy tears relieved her. She made an effort to rise from the cushion on which they had laid her, but a strong sensation of bodily weakness rendered it difficult, so she only stretched out her hand, and smiled the joyous thankful welcome which she could not speak. The fever of surprise and bewilderment

was absorbed in a stronger feeling. There was such stillness and safety in Alvar's presence, that she could not but be calm. Past and Future were no more, and the Present was her whole life.

"My child! my queen!" said he, kneeling down beside her and kissing the hand which she had given, as he addressed her by the two names which she bore for him, "Do not speak to me, for I know all. Rest and gather strength for the morrow, when I shall take you home."

She passed her fingers over his forehead, as if to assure herself that he was real. "Oh, Alvar—oh, joy—oh, happy, happy Nina!" murmured she in the tone in which a child lulls itself to sleep by whispering the sweetest words it knows.

"It is all happiness now," said he, tenderly.

"I know that," answered Nina. Then she shut and reopened her eyes quickly, doubtful whether the vision would melt away. Then sat up, wringing her hands, and crying like one distracted, "Ah! *must* I wake? *Must* I wake? Ah! what shall I do?" And then lay down again, and said quietly and softly, "No, no—it is truth!"

For a tear, not her own, had dropped upon her arm, and when she looked into Alvar's face she saw that he could not speak, and she felt that no dream could have dared to present him to her in this manner. So there was silence for a little while, for the boundary of language was passed.

"Now sleep, my beloved, for we have far to go with the dawn," said Alvar, gently. He rose from his knees, but Nina's hand still held him fast, as though she dreaded that he might escape her.

"Cannot you trust me out of your sight?" asked he, with a half-reproachful smile. "Believe me when I tell you there is nothing to fear—nothing!"

She returned his smile, and dropped his hand, though reluctantly. "How did it all happen?" asked she, looking wistfully around her, and speaking, if the truth must be told, rather because she wished to detain him, and was ashamed to say so, than for any other reason. "How came we here? This is one of the pavilion chambers! But how came you to this place at all, Alvar? Came you to meet me?"

"No, by my soul!" replied the knight. "When I first saw thy fair face in the moonlight, I did verily believe that Our Lady, to whom I have so often prayed in thy behalf, was working a special miracle before mine eyes! I have sought thee far and wide, dearest Nina, but I never dreamed of seeking thee here!"

"But the messenger—the token!" exclaimed Nina, looking at him in amazement.

"I sent no messenger," replied Alvar.

"He showed me that gem which you were wont to wear upon your gorget," continued she, "a clasp of emeralds and silver, and bade me trust myself to him. I would have trusted myself to a glove from your hand!"

A sudden flush overspread the knight's face as she spoke, followed by a paleness as sudden. He clenched his hand and smote his foot upon the ground, muttering between his teeth the words, "Foul treason!"

"Nina," said he aloud, "ask me nothing of that messenger—he is a traitor. And ask me not why I came

hither. I cannot tell you. Heaven has dropped a jewel into our hands—let us rejoice in the gift, and inquire not too closely how it came! And now, dearest, good-night —how much sweeter is that word than farewell, for it tells of daily meeting! Good night, for I have work to do, and must leave you!"

He saw the doubt and wonder in her face, and, with a sudden impulse, cast himself once more on his knees beside her, and fixed his glowing eyes on hers. "Trust me, Nina! Trust me always!" said he.

"With my life!" she answered, as she had answered once before. And so they parted.

Not long had he been gone when a cry rang through the silence of the pavilion, making the darkness shiver. It was a woman's voice, terrible in its helplessness; there was neither fear nor sorrow in the sound, but there was despair. And silence shut over it again, as the waters shut over the last struggle of one drowning. Cloven and scattered for a moment by a vision of terror, they close quietly above It, and none who saw It not could dream that they were closing over death.

Nina rushed to the door of her apartment, but was checked on the threshold. As she was about to pass into the great saloon, she perceived that a change had taken place since she crossed it two hours before, to keep her appointment. The one silver lamp still burned; the faint and tender light still hovered dreamily on cushions and draperies of gold and crimson, and glanced timidly at gems and mirrors, and made the alabaster carvings look as though they were moulded out of white morning clouds;

but no slave lay asleep before the curtain which shrouded Amine's chamber. In her stead there stood Abderahman himself, a little withdrawn from the portal, his arms folded upon his breast, his eyes fixed upon the ground; motionless, stern, and splendid, like some wondrous waxen image. As Nina gazed upon him, he suddenly lifted his proud head, and seemed to shake the trouble from his brow. His eyes were full of triumph, yet softened by a strange light of pity.

"It is enough," said he, aloud, and made a step towards the door of Amine's chamber. At the same moment, a hand within lifted the curtain. But Nina turned away her face and withdrew, for she felt that she had no right thus to play the spy; and kneeling down ere she sought her couch, she prayed, she knew not why, long and fervently for Amine.

Nina was early awake next morning, after a brief and disturbed slumber, in which bodily weariness had for a little while succeeded not in stilling, but in bewildering the busy course of thought. When she first unclosed her eyes, the images which had visited her sleep blended with those which had preceded it; and all were alike so strange, and so vivid, that she could scarcely distinguish truth from fantasy. Joy and sorrow are both liable to this bewilderment of thought, but how different is the return of consciousness in the two cases! In the one it is as the touch of an ice-cold finger upon the heart, chilling the life as it drives away the sleep; in the other, it is like the kiss which a mother drops upon the cheek of her babe, wakening him from the happy forgetfulness to yet happier recollection.

Nina had scarcely time to dress herself and take some hurried refreshment, ere she was told that Alvar awaited her, and was ready to depart. The women crowded around her somewhat clamorously, all caressing her, some shedding tears; and she inwardly reproached herself that she had no tears to shed in return. She passed, trembling, through the saloon, and involuntarily looked round for Amine. But Amine was nowhere to be seen, nor did any sign or message acquaint Nina that she was aware of her departure. An undefinable dread withheld Nina from asking any question on the subject; yet there was a voice at her heart which would not quite be silenced even now. As she issued from the pavilion, she stopped and plucked a large lily-blossom from a plant which grew beside the marble steps. It was one of those graceful flowers which look as though some delicate hand had sculptured them in snow, and made them durable by a spell; one sees such sometimes in pictures of the Blessed Virgin.

"Give this flower to the Lady Amine, and bid her sometimes think of me kindly," said Nina, turning to one of the women, who had paused within the threshold, which the laws of her people permitted her not to cross when men were near.

The Moorish damsel was about to take the gift, when a hand, suddenly and swiftly interposing, withdrew it from Nina's grasp. She looked up and beheld Alvar. He cast the flower upon the pavement, and, setting his mailed heel upon it, crushed it to powder.

"Ah!" cried Nina, putting her hands together with an expression of dismay, and looking up into his face,

which was dark and stern. Light broke over it in an instant; and as he lifted Nina in his arms, and carried her to the palfrey which awaited her at the foot of the steps, he said with the utmost tenderness—

"Forgive me, dearest Nina, but forget not that it is unseemly that any token of affection should pass between a Christian maiden and an infidel."

"She was kind to me," murmured Nina, only half satisfied, though it was Alvar.

"Remember her then in your prayers," he replied; "but remember her in no other manner."

His voice was so deep, his eye so full of trouble, that Nina was subdued in an instant, and offered no further remonstrance. And so he placed her on her steed; and taking the bridle in his hand, walked beside her, smiling when she smiled, and laid one delicate hand gently on his shoulder. They passed out of the gardens, and through the streets of the gorgeous city, escorted by a party of Moorish horsemen. A mile beyond the city gates they came up with a band of ten lances, wearing the green and silver colours, which Nina knew to be Alvar's. Here they halted, and took leave of their Moorish companions, who departed with grave courtesy, the leader first giving into Alvar's keeping a safe-conduct, signed and sealed by the Caliph himself, under the guardianship of which they might have travelled from one end of the Moslem territory to the other without fear.

Alvar now addressed himself to the Christian horsemen. "My friends," said he, "we have here a most sacred and precious charge, and, by God's help, one that we will de-

fend with our lives! This is your liege lady and countess, the Princess Nina, sovereign of Barcelona! Lift up your veil, dear lady," he added, lowering his voice as he turned to Nina herself, "and let them look upon a face which, once seen, they can never forget."

Thus adjured, Nina drew aside her veil, and sat looking upon them with an air half bashful, half stately, but singularly graceful, drawing her lovely head a little back, and blushing deeply as they stared in amazement upon her. A grey-haired man, who seemed the chief soldier of the little group, dismounted as Alvar ceased speaking, and approaching Nina's palfrey, gazed earnestly, though not disrespectfully, in her face. For a moment her sparkling blue eyes encountered the full force of the gaze, as though she would have defied him to disparage aught so beautiful and so innocent, when he once looked upon it; then the quick blood mounted even to her forehead, and, involuntarily, she dropped her veil. At this womanly movement, which seemed an appeal rather to their sympathy than to their loyalty, an enthusiastic shout, "God save the Countess Nina!" rent the air; and Nina put her hand into Alvar's, at once frightened and delighted by this first recognition of her position. Gravely he raised it to his lips; but she understood not at the moment the full import of the action. The old man who had first approached her kneeled down and kissed the tiny, slippered foot, which rested in the heavy stirrup.

"God bless you, gentle lady," said he. "I pray you be not wroth with my lack of manners. I served your noble mother once, and could believe that in looking upon

you I see her once more, as on that day when Count Miro presented her to us as his bride. God send you a bridal as happy as hers, and preserve the happiness to you far longer."

So saying, he remounted his horse and rode on, Nina acknowledging his words by a gentle inclination of the head.

She had much to learn of what had passed since they parted, and Alvar seemed rather disposed to relate his own history, than to inquire minutely into hers. He told her how he had fulfilled his mission to Narbonne, and how Hugh of France had furnished him with a troop of horse, and entrusted him with a letter to Suniario, demanding the recognition of the Countess Nina. He had proceeded at once to Barcelona to deliver this missive, and to tax Suniario with his treason, face to face—denying himself the happiness of a return to Castle Muza till he could announce that the errand on which he had departed was fully performed. Suniario received him in the midst of his courtiers, and heard him with an air of cold and scornful incredulity.

"The noble Hugh of France," said he, as he took the letter into his hand, "must pardon me if I cannot command a faith as childlike as his own. I need good evidence, ere I can believe a miracle."

As he spoke, his eye rested with contemptuous meaning upon Alvar, who, making a step forward into the centre of the hall, drew his iron glove from his hand, and flung it upon the pavement. The solitary clash was echoed ere it had ceased to sound, by a general clatter of steel, as

each gauntlet in the chamber closed involuntarily upon the hilt of the wearer's sword.

"False Count!" cried Alvar, "I accuse thee of the murder of my father, and of treason to thy Queen, and I defy thee to mortal combat, although thou be unworthy to die by the stroke of an honourable sword! Confront me with Juan of Ripol, that I may prove my words."

(How Nina thought she saw him at that moment, standing so magnificently in the midst of them, and putting all to shame by his very presence! She had a vision of power before her eyes, such as artists have loved to image for the great Archangel, when, with one sweep of of his majestic foot, he spurns the Dragon into nothingnesss.)

But Suniario stood unmoved, and the dark triumph of his eye told that he knew he had nothing to fear, though Alvar could not conceive on what basis his secret confidence rested. "I will lift yonder gauntlet," said he, "when you produce this fabled Countess Nina—or this Juan of Ripol, whose name I have indeed heard in times long gone by, though I know not whether he be now alive or dead. Till then, let it lie on the pavement, powerléss as he who wore it—bearing its silent witness that your words are shadows."

The fear which shot into Alvar's heart when he was thus defied to produce Nina, rendered him speechless for an instant. His hands trembled with emotion as he clasped them and lifted them to heaven. "Base and heartless traîtor!" exclaimed he at length, in a voice which thrilled upon the ear as lightning upon the eye—"if thou hast

harmed one hair of her precious head while I was not by to protect her, dream not to escape my vengeance! Though all Barcelona gather round thy throne, I will pluck thee from the midst; though the world stand by and gaze, my foot shall crush the heart out of thy coward body!"

Without another word, he turned and strode from the chamber, none daring to touch him, because he was the ambassador of the great Duke Hugh, though many an eye glowered darkly at him as he passed.

Nina's ready and repentant sympathy followed him to Castle Muza, and she held up her hand to deprecate his eloquent description of all that he suffered when he found that she had fled. Suniario's evident knowledge of her flight had entirely misled Alvar, who never doubted for an instant that she had fallen into his hands. The long months which ensued had been passed in a fruitless search for her, or—though Alvar would scarcely avow it even to himself—for some trace of the manner in which she had perished; for the hope of finding her alive dwindled week by week, and was almost dead at that bright moment when he started to find her in his arms. Alvar now conjectured that Suniario had become cognizant of her retreat at, or soon after, the time of her escape from it; that this secret knowledge had rendered him bold for the time, and that his emissaries had probably been busily engaged in seeking her for purposes which made him shudder, as he considered what might have befallen, if their discovery had preceded his only by a day. Juan of Ripol had disappeared from San Pablo, and Alvar could learn nothing of

him. Whether his flight was voluntary, or whether he had been spirited away to secure his master from the production of certain awkward evidence of past doings, it was impossible to divine. The latter supposition seemed, however, the more probable of the two, since his witness would have been valuable to Suniario, if he had been ready to give it as heretofore, on whichever side it might happen to be required. One more circumstance, very important to Nina's fortunes, remained to be told. Hugh of France was on his way to Barcelona, and would probably reach the city some days before Alvar and Nina could arrive at it. He had determined to judge in person the cause which Count Miro had committed to his hands, but had waited till Alvar should have completed his search through those remote and scarcely accessible districts of the Barcelonese domain, in which there was still some hope that Nina might be concealed. Alvar was engaged on an expedition of this nature when he received Duke Hugh's summons, in compliance with which he had intended to proceed to Barcelona, and there, in presence of Suniario and his nobles, to narrate the entire history of his imprisonment at San Pablo, and make solemn oath that, on two occasions, Suniario had been seen there, in company with Juan, once by Nina, once by himself. So skilfully had the traitor devised his schemes, that the direct evidence against him was confined to this; and Alvar was indignantly conscious that it would be but too easy to explain it away, in the absence of both Juan and Nina. Yet his confidence in the Divine justice made him cling to the hope that the final triumph of such villainy was impossible, even in this

world; and he was, at least, sure that Suniario would not dare to refuse his challenge in the presence of the great Duke Hugh, so that he could not be denied the satisfaction of punishing the crime which he might be unable fully to expose or to repair.

Thus far, Alvar's narrative was clear and intelligible enough, but when he approached the subject of those mysterious events which had led to Nina's liberation, he became embarrassed, and shrank from prolonging the conversation. Of the messenger, he merely said that he was a foul traitor, and that he had no errand to Nina. Of his own visit to Medina-Azhara, a place which lay several days' journey from the region which he had been examining, he gave no explanation whatever, leaving the delay which he had thus voluntarily incurred in his return to Barcelona wholly unaccounted for. Whenever the topic was alluded to, there came into his face an expression so strange and so painful, that Nina was soon as eager to avoid it as he could be himself. Why should she desire to learn anything which he shrank from telling? She knew that she was safe and happy, and she knew that he could not be wrong, and what more could she need to know? No cloud could flit across his face without keeping the sunshine from her heart, and thus casting a shadow upon it.

And so, during this journey, they enjoyed a communion so bright, so peaceful, and so perfect, that it seemed as though the old sweet days of their island life were come back to them. Save that as the veil was lifted, fold by fold, from Nina's innocent spirit, he could see that it had

assumed the proportions and lineaments of womanhood, and he stood in its presence with a new feeling, as he beheld in it a new and a loftier beauty. Nor did he dare to question his own heart, till it spake to him boldly of itself and said, "This is thy life! how canst thou be parted from it?"

XII.

"Nina, you are a woman now! Do you remember how you longed for womanhood?"

They were winding down a gentle slope at the threshold of a secret passage through the hills. They were descending upon a plain which was now, in early spring, one vast sheet of living bloom and verdure, and across which a river, twinkling all over in the first morning beams, lay like the galaxy which belts the skies of midnight. Far away, a toothed peak of shining snow showed like a crown against the tender blue of heaven; and graver hills, garmented in olive and plane trees, were clustering about its base, and seeming to bear it up lest its purity should be defiled by too close a neighbourhood with earth. Alvar's hand was upon the bridle of Nina's palfrey, and both horse and leader lingered as they moved, as though they would fain have detained so beautiful a moment.

She smiled as she answered, for she had desired to know that he no longer held her for a child. "Do you remember teaching me what woman should be?" asked she.

"Life has been a better teacher than I," he replied.

"Ah, no!" she said, clasping her hands; "life teaches only from the outside, and it is far sweeter to have a light

within. I wonder how long I could have continued to live only upon remembrance. It was so cold and so sad."

"Is it cold and sad now?"

She stretched out her hands to him, and shook back the curls which shaded a countenance absolutely radiant with joy.

"Oh, Alvar!" she said, "is there sorrow in the world?"

"None," he answered, for his arm was on her horse's neck, and his eyes on her face, and he thought so.

"How far are we now from Barcelona?" she asked, after a pause.

"Four days' journey."

"I do not wish to be there. It would be a lovely thought to do always as we are doing now—to pass *by* life, not *through* it. Wandering ever from one bright spot to another—seeing all earth as a picture which Morning, Noon, and Night should paint for us, each in her own sweet hues—and having no part in any save in each other. Would not life be like the course of some rare melody which winds ever onward, leading you from one tuneful note to another—lulling you by the repose of sweet delays only to make you long for the next bewitching harmony, till it guides you to the peace and grandeur of a close which so delights the ear that it desires nothing but silence afterwards?"

"Yes," he answered, "it were indeed a lovely thought; and the evil which is in this world would never trouble because it could never touch us; and we should be so ready for the bright stillness of the next, that death would seem no change—only a little movement onwards. Hand-in-

hand we should pass the lucid verge of sunset only to rise above the gleaming boundary of dawn. You could not tremble while your soul was leaning upon mine; nor could I shrink ashamed from the keen light of Paradise, having breathed so long the air which your dear thoughts had purified."

"We should not be without our work to do," continued she, pursuing the graceful fancy. "See how many huts we pass on our way, and every hut a home; lowly hearths they seem, where poverty and sorrow may crouch among the children, and where the hearts may be as dark as the dwelling-place. Would it not be sweet to pause on every threshold, and proclaim that God is good, and life is happy!"

"Ay, and to make life happy!" replied he; "for what grief is there which your voice would not turn to joy?"

"Or what wrong which your arm could not redress?" she added.

"It were fitting labour for a Christian sword," he said, "to make every man free to serve his God and till his field in peace."

"And could not I, meanwhile," she asked, "lay the sick little ones in my bosom, and soothe them into slumber and health; and teach the weeping mothers how the Divine hand shall wipe all tears from their faces?"

"It were an angel's mission," he cried, "and so most fit for you!"

"And then," said she, "the souls we had helped should gather round us as we went, and make a grateful clamour at the door of heaven to pray for our admission!"

"A Vision!" said he, shaking his head, and smiling as the bright fantasy floated away from his gaze.

"A Truth!" answered she, laying both her hands on his shoulders, and looking into his eyes as though she would have kindled there the light of her own.

They had paused in the earnestness of their conversation, regarding not that their little train had outstripped them. When Nina thus touched his shoulders, and brought her shining eyes so close to his, he did not abide the gaze, but shrank aside, and, with a sudden movement, dropped his face upon his hands. At that moment the first slight chill passed over her heart, though it was rather wonder than fear which caused it. She would have spoken, but he forestalled her, saying, in a changed and careless voice, "We are losing time, dear lady. There is a long level before us, and now, with your good leave, I will mount my horse, and ride beside you. We must quicken our pace a little."

In an instant he was on his steed, which had hitherto been led by one of the attendants. He returned to Nina's side, and they rode swiftly forward over the plain. And it seemed as though, between her soul and the radiant scenery on which it had been gazing so delightedly, a thin grey film was spread—not, indeed, hiding the lights and hues of the prospect, but dimming them all a little, and separating them more widely from her, and making them less real.

That night they made their usual arrangements for repose in the shadow of a grove of trees, a little apart from the road on which they had been travelling. A small tent,

which their sumpter-mule carried, was pitched upon the green sward for Nina, and the soldiers lay on the earth around it, two watching while the rest slept. Alvar himself invariably kept watch before the entrance of the tent till dawn, and then lay down outside the threshold to snatch an hour or two of necessary sleep ere they recommenced their journey. During these night-watches he was wont to solace himself with bright and noble thoughts. He would muse upon the exceeding preciousness of the jewel entrusted to his keeping, and upon the great honour which he enjoyed in being permitted to assume such a charge. He would pray that the career of high achievements, on which he was still only entering, might brighten, and not fade as it proceeded. He would pray that he might ever live thus, keeping watch over the casket which held that costly jewel, and suffering no evil eye to glance upon it. He would dream of a future in which she might ever sit enthroned in tranquil and perpetual sunshine, while he stood near her feet striking to earth any dark shape that might approach to cast but a moment's shadow upon her. Or he would dream of the present only; and in that dream forget everything, losing his thoughts in a maze of delight, where no path was apparent and no form distinct, yet all was beauty. This night his thoughts were different.

"My heart is gone from me!" Thus ran his musings, as he paced slowly up and down in the moonlight before the small white tent, with a countenance so sad, so resolute, and yet so deeply moved, that you might well believe no common strife was stirring his noble nature. "My heart is gone from me, and I must suffer! But

what then? Must I also do wrong? Have I done wrong? Had I the right to take this tender bird into my bosom, and teach it to know me ere it could learn to distinguish another? Have I done this? No, no! she is still but a child. I only shall suffer, as I only have deserved to suffer. In six months—" he paused and smote his hand upon his brow with a look of anguish—" in six months she will forget me. Yet if she shed but one tear for me—one tear that I shall cost, and that I might have spared her—I am worthy of death. How could I do this thing? Shame, shame! I, with nothing but my name and my sword, and she a princess! To win her ere she has had time to cast one glance upon that world of which she knows nothing save what I have told her. It shall never be said that I could do so foul a deed. No, by God's help, that shall never be! Beautiful dream, sweet madness, depart from me! The time of truth, the time of punishment begins. Well may I suffer humbly, for I have deserved it! Yet, oh! may the pity of Heaven be around her, preserving her from even a moment's sorrow! How shall I bear—how shall I bear to see one downcast look in those precious eyes, and know that I brought it there, and know that I could chase it, but must not! Nina, mine own, my child, my queen, farewell! but forgive me—forgive me, and oh! do not mourn for me! Be happy without me; yet, how canst thou so be happy when I cannot live without thee? Oh, my father! who never didst one deed upon which conscience was afraid to look, I am ashamed in the presence of thy spirit, and *unworthy* to inherit thy name. Yet, if thou

now beholdest thy son, pardon him; he is about to atone for the sin of the heart by rending the heart in twain. He has done with weakness."

Still he paced sternly up and down, and seemed at every step to set his foot upon the neck of his rebellious soul, and compel it to do homage to his will. The first faint glimmer of morning was just beginning to make the stars look a little wan, when the figure of a man glided past one of the armed sentinels, and approached the tent. He made no attempt to enter, but stood still with folded arms and depressed head, confronting Alvar as he turned upon his rapid walk. The uncertain twilight revealed the flowing garments, swarthy countenance, and white turban of a Moor.

"Who art thou, in Our Lady's name?" demanded Alvar, somewhat startled by this unexpected apparition.

"It skills not asking who I am," replied the stranger. "I am here on an errand, and I speak not from myself."

"From whom come you, then, and to whom is your errand, infidel?" resumed Alvar. "You pass not here unquestioned."

"My mission is to the Lord Alvar," answered the Moor, quite undisturbed by the somewhat discourteous manner in which he was addressed; "and I come from the Pavilion of the Garden, from the palace of the mighty Caliph himself, who is—Allah preserve him!—the light of the world, and the commander of the faithful."

"And what token bringest thou me that I may know thou deceivest me not?" inquired Alvar, drawing closer to the speaker, and somewhat lowering his voice.

"I bring this," returned the Moslem. He drew out of the folds of his turban a clasp of silver set with emeralds, and held it forth to Alvar, who knew it for his own at a glance. He took it in his hand, saying hurriedly, and with evident emotion as he did so—

"What is thy message?"

"It is a strange message from the lips of a true believer," replied the other. "Knowest thou not, Christian, that the clasp is useless without the collar, and the collar avails not unless there be one to wear it? The person to whom yonder clasp was given demands that the gift be made complete."

Alvar drew his brows together till they met, and seemed to concentrate and repress the fire which flashed forth from his eyes. "Speak more plainly, Moor," said he, in a deep voice: "I read not riddles."

"Plainly, then, thou discourteous Christian," answered the imperturbable Moor, "thou art desired, nay, thou art earnestly entreated, to return to Medina-Azhara, by one who honours thee too far in stooping to hold any converse with thee."

"Knowest thou the import of thine own message?" demanded Alvar, too deeply engaged with the meaning of what he had heard to consider the terms in which it was conveyed."

"I know all," replied the other; "more than thou knowest—more than I may utter."

"Tell me, then," said Alvar, in the same suppressed and anxious tone, "if I should do the bidding of—of—those who sent thee to me—if I should return to Medina-

Azhara as thou sayest—should I depart from it again, alone? Bringest thou any promise?"

"I bring no promise, and thou wouldst depart alone from the royal city," was the answer.

"For what, then, is my presence demanded?" asked the knight, shutting his teeth and pressing his hands together like one who stifles some great emotion.

"Thou art invited," replied the Moor, "that thou mayest carry comfort to a sorely wounded spirit; though, in truth, thou man of an ungracious countenance, thou lookest most unmeet for the office of a comforter."

"Dog!" returned Alvar, throwing back his head, while his face expressed the most fiery scorn and wrath, strangely blended with a pain which he seemed to despise and ignore, though he could not altogether suppress it—"dog! if that be all, go back and tell thy lord—ay, and thy lady also—how thou hast seen me treat the token which their hands have polluted!"

He flung the gem upon the earth, and set his heel upon it, as he had done before by the flower which Nina had plucked. Then, turning his back upon the Moor, he stalked away, like a roused lion who finds that the foe who has presumed to disturb him is too mean an object for the exercise of his kingly rage.

"Stay yet a moment, thou angry knight," said the Moor, pursuing him, "and listen to one word of friendly warning. If there be traitors among thy men, beware! for yonder soldier has played the spy upon us, though with what success I cannot tell, since I know not how much he has heard or comprehended of our colloquy."

"I have none but true men about me," returned Alvar tossing him a look of the utmost disdain, and continuing his proud walk to and fro before the entrance of the tent, as if unconscious of the presence of any witness.

The Moor looked for a moment at the soldier of whom he had spoken, and who, ere the words were well out of his lips, had resumed his post with a certain dull and dogged expression of countenance that might have baffled the most penetrating inquirer. "Foolish Christian!" said he calmly, as he, too, moved away, "thou carriest a dagger for defence, and plungest it into thine own heart!"

When Nina issued from her tent in the morning, she noticed a certain unwonted paleness on the face of her friend, and demanded anxiously whether he had rested well. He could not evade her questioning, and the evident tenderness which her manner expressed as she besought him to delay their journey, and to promise her that he would resign his office of sentinel, for one night at least, and take the repose which she was sure he needed, rendered it difficult for him to preserve that grave, gentle, cold demeanour which he had determined to assume towards her for the future. His supposed indisposition was, however, fortunate in one respect, as it supplied her with a ready reason for any change in his bearing, which she could not help perceiving, and which she certainly would not have rested without explaining in some manner satisfactory to herself. And so the slow day crawled away; heavily enough for him, but without bringing them to any explanation. She was eager that he should ride, because it might have fatigued him to walk; she was scrupu-

lously silent, because she feared that conversation might weary him; and ever and anon she turned her lovely eyes upon him with a look so full of confidence, and sympathy, and anxious affection, that he could scarcely resist the impulse which prompted him to cast himself at her feet and pour out his heart before her. But he did resist it; ay, and he resisted a yet stronger temptation.

He had seated himself upon the grass before the door of her tent at nightfall, feeling, indeed, somewhat of that bodily lassitude which she attributed to him, and which scarcely ever fails to follow upon strong mental emotion, when she came softly out and stood beside him. In her white apparel, half covered as it was with the flowing mantle of her golden hair, she seemed more like a phantom conjured up by the moonlight and by his busy thoughts, than the living woman who was indeed the subject of those thoughts.

She laid her small, cool hand upon his forehead, and he shivered at the touch.

"It burns!" said she; "see, I have brought you a kerchief steeped in essences, and you must let me bind this cruel brow, which has no right to ache and trouble you."

Stooping over him, and not suffering him to rise, she wound the handkerchief about his head, and he did not drop one kiss upon the hand which did him such loving service. Then, with a murmured "Good-night, dear Alvar!" she stole back to her chamber. If Alvar wept when she was gone, and no eye save God's beheld him, shall those tears be deemed any shame to his knighthood?

The morrow was more gloomy yet, for it became im-

possible that Nina should be any longer blind to the fact that there was a change, not so much in Alvar's health as in himself. Yet he was no man to act uncertainly or weakly; having seen and weighed the truth, and deliberately taken up his resolution, he was not one either to suffer himself to be diverted from it by any passing impulse, or to render it practically nugatory by any excessive or imprudent demonstration. His heart was at this time calm, wise, and miserable. He gave her no opportunity for remonstrance, no subject for appeal. Gentle and considerate, tender and respectful as he was in his manner to her, waiting upon every want, forestalling every wish, replying to every question, of what could she complain? There was a womanly instinct rising at her heart which withheld her from saying, "Why walk you not at my bridle? why seek you not that deeper communion which was so sweet? why does each word with which I would unclose my thoughts drop lifeless upon your ear, awakening, indeed, a reply, but no response? and why are your thoughts, once so open before me, shut and sealed?" And unless she could have said this, there was nothing for her to say. That which he had set himself to do, he did perfectly. And if at any time her impetuous nature was ready to break out, she felt that the command of his eye was upon her, and refrained she knew not why. Little did she know how cruel a restraint he put upon himself in thus restraining her. Little could she tell that he was breaking his own heart upon the wheel by each successive act which gave such pain to hers.

Once, when the cold quiet voice in which he answered

her seemed well-nigh intolerable, she turned suddenly towards him, and fixed her eyes upon his face—eyes eloquent with a pathetic and astonished question which compelled reply. "Why are you thus to me?" they said, though her lips uttered no sound. In an instant he was by her horse's side, but not for an instant did he betray the impulse which brought him there. Without looking at her, he asked in a tone which expressed the slightest emotion of surprise, "Have I offended you, dear lady?"

And Nina—too young in heart and years to understand why he avoided her glance, and so to penetrate his secret—answered as gravely as she was asked, "Not in the least; why should you think so?" and felt that she would have died sooner than suffer him to discover what had passed in her mind.

For at that moment a new feeling awoke within her, and a mixture of pride, shame, and modesty made her dumb. She began to think that he was pitying her and sparing her, that he had seen in her something, she knew not what, to which there was in himself no response, that he had detected in her that which she was scarcely beginning to detect in herself. It was all confused and unintelligible within her; yet, true to her maidenly instinct, she hesitated not for a moment as to what her behaviour must be, though she could scarcely have defined the reasons why it should be so. Hers was a proud spirit, and it was wounded to the quick, and stung even to agony. Yet all the while she was so innocent and so unconscious, that she would fain have asked him to teach her where the wrong lay for which she was atoning so

bitterly. Well was it for her that they had but one day more to pass together, for her strength might have failed in a longer trial. She understood so little of the desolation which was coming upon her that, though she contemplated it with a kind of terror, she scarcely knew from what she was shrinking. She stood as a child might stand on the seashore, watching the advancing waters, and not even crying for help till the strong wave is at its throat, and help is useless.

But now Alvar's practical difficulties ceased, for she was afraid of his presence, and avoided him as carefully as he shunned her. A slight sense of wrong, a transient feeling of anger, lent her fictitious strength, and enabled her to play her part naturally for the time. Nay, as we have said, hers was a proud spirit, and when alone she would wring her hands, and wish only that these cruel hours were over, that she might be away from him, and never look upon his face again. And doubtless this natural indignation would for a while prevent her from drinking her cup of sorrow to the dregs—though, alas! the delay would but make the draught more bitter when she came to drain it. To Alvar himself no moment was so hard as that in which he first became conscious of success in the task which he had set himself. As they drew near the termination of their journey he once more approached her, and began a conversation which he had meditated for some time without finding himself capable of putting his intentions into action.

"Seest thou yonder towers, lady?" said he, pointing to a purple mass of building which, in the evening twilight,

looked farther from them than it actually was; "that is your fair city of Barcelona; and I can see by the white pennon which waves above the gateway that Duke Hugh is now within it."

"To his care I suppose I am to be committed," answered Nina.

There was a slight tremulousness in her voice which went to his heart. He longed to take her in his arms, and tell her that she should be given to no care but his own, and that nothing but death should divide him from her. Her face looked so young and so timid in its unnatural gravity, that he thought she was frightened at the new life and strange guardianship into which she was about to enter, and that he must needs soothe, and protect, and cherish her now, as when he fostered her childhood two years before—that lovely childhood from which, in truth, she had scarcely emerged. His pause, his agitation, alarmed her, and once more she thought that he was looking upon her with compassion, and that she was betraying some feeling which she ought to be ashamed to avow. A deep glow came to her cheeks, and she said, with a somewhat lofty movement of the head—

"Where shall I rest to-night?"

"In your own palace," he replied. "I have sent forward a messenger to announce your approach, and I expect each minute to meet the train which Duke Hugh will doubtless dispatch to receive and escort you."

Nina's hand closed tightly upon her bridle-rein. "It is then nearly over," thought she, with a swelling heart—"it *is* nearly over! In another minute perhaps we shall part.

He cares not. How shall I bear it? What shall I do?" And the words "nearly over! nearly over!" rang with swift and distracting reiteration through her mind as she answered, bowing her head,—

"It is well."

"If I speak not now," said Alvar within himself, "I shall never speak; and I would not that she should learn my determination from another."

"Lady," said he, aloud, "when you are enthroned in your own dominion I shall have a boon to ask."

"There can be no boon," replied Nina, hurriedly forcing herself to speak, and reminding herself of all the gratitude she owed him—"no boon within my power which it would not be sin to deny to one—" who has preserved me, she *would* have added, but her voice failed her; and had the struggle in Alvar's breast been at that moment one whit less terrible, he could not have failed to perceive that he was trying her beyond her strength.

"It is but that you will bestow upon me the command of the marches of Catalonia," answered he, "and suffer me to keep your goodly kingdom from the polluting footsteps of the infidel. There, by God's help, I may do you good service, and there, if it be His will, I would desire to die in my harness the first time my sword leaves the scabbard."

He could not help the words, nor could she help her answer. He had driven the poniard home. Only one word did she utter—only his name, "Alvar!"—but it was in a breaking, agonized voice, with hands dropping the rein, and cheeks losing their colour, and eyes uplifted with

such a look of sudden reproach, and wonder, and appeal, that all the determination in his soul was scattered to the winds.

He was saved from momentary happiness and from lasting self-contempt by no movement of his own. A clangour of trumpets and drums rushed suddenly through the air, and, before either Nina or Alvar had time to assume a semblance of composure, a goodly company of armed men, with horses prancing, and mail glittering, and white banners streaming upon the wind, and Duke Hugh himself at their head, rode gallantly up to them at full speed. The stately Duke dismounted, and put one knee to the ground to assist Nina from her palfrey, addressing her with many courteous words and graceful titles, which she neither heard nor understood. Her white cheeks and bewildered air were attributed to fatigue, and when, on being lifted into the splendid litter prepared for her reception, she swooned away upon the cushions, no doubt could be entertained for a moment that she was exhausted by her long journey. Duke Hugh had not failed to bring ladies with him to wait upon her, and there was no lack of care and attendance; he, too, for his own part, was so much interested by his lovely charge, that after folding Alvar in a hasty embrace, and bidding God bless him! with that familiar appellation, "my son," by which he invariably addressed him, he left the young man to his own meditations. And Alvar, unconscious of Nina's swoon, brooding over his own errors and his own misfortunes, thinking with agony of that one word "Alvar!"—that sweet, despairing cry, which was ever in his ears—yet feeling sure that he

had done right, and believing—mistakenly, blindly, obstinately believing—that, while his heart was desolate for ever, there was no grief in Nina's which a month would not sweep away, rode darkly in the rear of the party and spoke to no one. In this manner they entered Barcelona.

XIII.

The council-chamber in the Royal Castle at Barcelona was prepared for some ceremony of more than ordinary importance. Within a deeply-embrasured window of three lights, which looked upon the sea, a patient secretary sat at his desk, to chronicle the proceedings of the assembly which was just beginning to gather. The grey stone walls were hung with gorgeous stuffs, spoils which Wifredo the Warlike had conquered from the Moor; and the grim corbels which here and there peered out from the folds of crimson and purple, and the rush-covered floor swept by the richly-variegated fringes, and the rough groining of the dark vaulted roof, rising above the cords of tarnished gold which sustained the drapery, offered to the thoughtful eye an abundance of those contrasts and inconsistencies which are the characteristic marks of barbaric splendour.

At the upper end of the room, which was of considerable size (being intended for those private councils which included only the chief grandees and statesmen of the little kingdom), there was a kind of dais, elevated above the rest of the floor by three steps, on the lowest of which lay a gauntlet of steel, as if it had just been plucked from the wearer's hand and flung there. In the centre of this raised platform, a throne, covered with blue and silver

hangings, and surmounted by a canopy of the same colours, was placed at an elevation of three more steps above the level of the dais. On either side of the throne stood a chair of honour, richly carved and decorated, and having a footstool before it. These were the only seats upon the dais, and they were intended for the two chief nobles of the council, Suniario, Lord of Urgel, and the great Duke Hugh of France. The lower floor was ranged round with seats, a vacant space being left in the centre. At the end of the room, immediately opposite to the throne, an arched portal communicated with the great banqueting-hall of the castle. This was the principal entrance, but there were two others in the wall behind the dais, beyond the seats of honour, at each side of the throne. These doors opened into galleries in the walls of the castle, which conducted, the one to the apartments of the women, the other to the state-rooms formerly inhabited by the count himself, and at the present time occupied by Suniario and Duke Hugh.

Several dark-visaged and bright-eyed warriors, clothed in mail, over which they wore surcoats of various gay colours, clanking their swords every time they stirred, and looking all ready for action at any moment, and on any pretext whatsoever, stood grouped together upon the lower floor, eagerly discussing the events of the last few days, while they awaited the opening of the council. From time to time the seneschal of the castle advanced up the room from the great doorway, which was guarded within and without by men-at-arms, and proclaimed the style and title of some new comer, who, striding along the floor in his rear, assumed a place among the rest. At the moment

in which we have ventured to invade the privacy of this sacred apartment, one of the debaters had hazarded a somewhat bold expression of opinion as to the probable fortunes of the crown of Barcelona, and the argument, never of the coolest temperature, had waxed flaming hot in a moment.

"I am for Suniario!" cried a truculent-looking baron of huge dimensions, with his hand on his sword; "I have served him since I was old enough to drive a dagger to the hilt, and I will stand by him now, though Charlemagne himself should rise from his grave to back this foreign Duke. What! are we men of Barcelona yet in our swaddling-clothes that we need a French nurse to teach us which way we should go?"

"The name of Hugh the White is a light throughout the world!" retorted a younger warrior, who had served his apprenticeship to arms in a somewhat less savage school, "and one by which it would be well if your Lord of Urgel were sometimes to guide his steps."

"Now, by the brow of Our Lady, *boy*—" began the other, with a contemptuous emphasis on the last word, which might have led to fiercer things had not a third speaker interposed and engaged the attention of both. This was the Lord of Palamos, a smooth and crafty man, who had more of the diplomatist than of the soldier in his composition, and who was well known to stand high in Suniario's confidence.

"You would do little pleasure to the Count Suniario," said he, addressing the indignant baron, "by separating his name from that of his great ally and very good friend,

Duke Hugh of France. Know you not that they are as brothers together, and that the noble Duke Hugh is as far as yourself from crediting any of those tales which foul tongues have secretly whispered about against the Lord of Urgel?"

"Therein he shows his wisdom," grumbled the baron, only half satisfied: "and, by my faith, could I encounter one of those foul tongues, I would so instruct it with my dagger, that it should babble no slander for the time to come!"

"Saw you the young Countess, my Lord of Palamos?" asked a fourth noble, the Marquis of Orista, now joining in the conversation. "I was too far off to see her face, but I heard that she is more beautiful than La Cava herself."

"She seemed a most comely damsel," replied he of Palamos; "a fitting bride for the son of the Lord Suniario, to whom, doubtless, she will soon be espoused. She has kept her chamber these two days, being wearied with her long journey; but I doubt not that she will grace our council this morning."

"The Lord Suniario," observed Orista, with a somewhat equivocal emphasis, "was doubtless greatly amazed and greatly delighted to find that his fair niece was still living. How has he dealt with that Juan of Ripol, who spirited her away and reported her death?"

"Ay!" added another; "and can any man divine what motive prompted the traitor so to deal with his born liege lady? To keep her from the throne of Barcelona profited *him* not at all."

"The caitiff, Juan of Ripol, has fled," replied the Count

of Palamos, in nowise disturbed by the suspicion which the accent and manner of the last two speakers evidently implied, "and none can tell by what motive he was actuated. But Suniario has sworn by the soul of his father that he will strike a dagger into his heart if ever he can find him."

"Men say that he will never find him," said the Marquis, with a peculiar smile; "and yet that if Suniario find him not, none other can. I pray you pardon me for repeating the common talk."

"The Marquis of Orista may *repeat* the common talk," answered Palamos; "but sure I am that he is too wise to *regard* it. There is none who dares to bring an accusation against the noble Suniario, save one nameless and landless knight, who seeks to maintain himself upon the reputation which his father won, and to which he has never added, and whose rank entitles him not to speak in our presence, nor to take part in our councils."

"I say nothing against the Lord of Urgel," replied the Marquis; "but of this Sir Alvar I know and may speak somewhat; and I say that there is not a braver nor a truer-hearted knight in the world; and so, I know, thinks Duke Hugh, though in this matter he believes him mistaken. Men say, my lord, that Sir Alvar will accuse Suniario before our council this day, and that he can bring no less a witness than the Countess Nina herself, to aver that her uncle was seen on the island of San Pablo, in company with Juan of Ripol."

"What a terrified child sees in the twilight is small evidence, methinks," replied Palamos, scornfully; "and even

if she saw aright, I cannot tell what evil it proves against Suniario. He has himself avowed that he was altogether deceived by this Juan, that he trusted and employed him, and knew no more that he was holding Sir Alvar in imprisonment than that he had imposed upon the world by a false report of the Lady Nina's death. And since you take an interest in this Alvar, I am sorry to tell you that if all I hear be true, he will have much ado to clear himself this morning, and it were well his friends should counsel him to beware how he speaks against another."

"He will speak the truth," said the Marquis; "and the best friend he has could counsel him to do no better. But here come Duke Hugh and the Lord of Urgel; so now to business."

One of the doors in the upper end of the apartment was now thrown open, and Suniario, Lord of Urgel, entered, preceded by pursuivants and men-at-arms, and conducting his illustrious guest, Duke Hugh of France.

A greater contrast could scarcely be imagined than that presented by the two warriors. The Frenchman, erect and stately in his bearing, presented a figure of the utmost dignity, though not above the middle stature: his broad forehead, fringed by scanty locks of silver white; his eye, calm yet sparkling, and full of fire; his bold, aquiline features, and massive resolute chin, together with an expression which seemed to combine a winning frankness and simplicity with the keenest intelligence and most inexorable determination, gave him an aspect at once venerable and heroic, which could not fail to command the reverence of the most casual observer. The Spaniard was

a good deal younger, and fully four inches taller, and might perhaps have been termed the handsomer man of the two. But though his face was not deficient either in spirit or intelligence, the former had a fierceness amounting to cruelty, while the latter was marred by an expression of cunning, and the combination of the two thus degraded involuntarily suggested the idea rather of a wild beast than of a rational being. As he moved restlessly about, his eye glancing from face to face, with a look at once uneasy and defiant, his pliant limbs never still for an instant, and his hand from time to time unconsciously clutching his sword and drawing it half out of its scabbard, he was the perfect image of a human tiger.

"Lords and nobles of the free kingdom of Barcelona!" said he, stepping to the front of the dais and addressing the little assembly: "We are met here this day, in the presence of the great Duke of France, whose fame is throughout the world, to debate of matters touching the welfare of our state, and to receive and acknowledge as our sovereign the Lady Nina, daughter and rightful heiress to my brother, Count Miro; and now, by the mercy of God, restored to us, after we had for many years believed her dead."

"I marvel that he can swallow so bitter a draught with so unmoved a countenance," whispered the Marquis of Orista to the noble who stood next him.

"Wait awhile—there is somewhat to sweeten it," was the reply.

"But ere we proceed," continued Suniario, "to this gracious task, we have a duty to perform which must not

be neglected. To execute judgment has been, in all ages, one of the highest privileges of authority; but it is one which may seem somewhat hard to our gentle lady, and which we shall do well to spare her, especially when the offender to be punished is a man who, despite his crimes, has done personal service to herself. Tell me, all of you, what that man deserves who has secretly sold this our free and goodly kingdom to the Moor?"

"Death!" was the immediate answer; and the numerous voices which united in that awful word shook the chamber as with a peal of thunder.

"What deserves he," pursued Suniario, "if he be one who in other matters has done good service to the country which he betrays?"

"No service can cancel such a crime. Death!" repeated they all.

Suniario drew himself up with an air of triumph, and plucking a dagger out of his girdle with a vehement and threatening gesture, as though he would gladly himself have executed the terrible sentence at the very moment of its proclamation, he said in a loud and resolute voice, —"Ye say well, my masters! I accuse the knight Alvar, son of him surnamed The True, of having entered into a secret compact with the Caliph to betray the chief fortresses of the kingdom, and admit the infidel within the gates of Barcelona itself. I accuse him of having done this foul and traitorous deed, under the persuasion that when the helpless girl, whom, by the order of Providence, but by no merit of his own, he had discovered and restored to us, was seated on her throne, her natural grati-

tude would raise him to such a place of trust and power, that he might do whatsoever he would. And I accuse him of seeking to rob her of that sure defence and unfailing support which she possessed in my loyalty and fatherly tenderness, by blackening my character, and alienating from me both her affections and the esteem of my fellow-countrymen."

The fierce rapidity with which these words were uttered, left no room for interruption. They were followed by an amazed silence, which lasted about the space of a minute, each man looking doubtfully on his neighbour. Then Hugh of France left his seat, and came to the front of the dais, saying in a disturbed manner,—

"My Lord Suniario, I knew nothing of this."

"It was not needful, most mighty Duke," replied the Lord of Urgel. "Moreover, I was loth to wound you by proclaiming the villainy of one whom you once loved as your own son, till the proof was complete. You shall now see how we do justice in Barcelona! Gentlemen, I see that you are amazed, and I marvel not that you can scarce credit what I have said. You shall have full satisfaction, one and all. Stand forward, my witnesses!"

Two men, separating themselves from among the suite of Suniario, now moved forward, and stood upon the lowest step of the dais, in the midst of the assembly.

"Will you judge a man in his absence?" cried Hugh of France indignantly. "I know little of the customs of your country, but this were deemed foul wrong in mine. Gentlemen all! I take you to witness that I will pledge my life on the faith of the knight Alvar!"

"Your life, great Duke," replied the Count of Palamos, shaking his head, "is too precious to be risked on a foundation so slight. I fear me there is no doubt of his guilt."

"It is for this assembly to judge whether there be grounds for my accusation," added Suniario, with the air of forced courtesy and respect which he invariably assumed towards Duke Hugh; "when they have decided, he shall be summoned and heard in his own defence. Doubt not that he shall have full justice."

Hugh of France resumed his seat with an air of displeasure and anxiety. He felt all the delicacy of his position as a guest in a foreign court, and one whose business was simply to see that his ward the Countess Nina was restored to her rights, not to meddle with the course of justice as regarded any subject of the Barcelonese kingdom. He had no choice but to listen; resolving, however, to weigh and watch the evidence narrowly, and to see that no wrong was done to Alvar, of whose entire innocence he entertained not a moment's doubt.

He was startled by the amount and consistency of the evidence. The first witness averred that he followed the occupation of a travelling merchant, and in that capacity frequently traded with the Moors; that he had been employed by Alvar to carry a private letter to the Caliph; that he was ignorant of its contents, but shrewdly suspected some evil; that during his expedition he had become unexpectedly aware of the existence and captivity of the Princess Nina; that he had sought to obtain her confidence by exhibiting to her a jewel which Alvar had pre-

sented to him as a bribe to induce him to undertake the delivery of his letter; that he had intended to be himself the instrument of Lady Nina's liberation, having seen increasing reason to suspect that Alvar was a traitor; that on his return from Medina-Azhara, to arrange a scheme for her escape, he had encountered Alvar, who had addressed him roughly, taxed him with treachery, and sought to wrest the jewel from him by violence; that he had with the utmost difficulty escaped, and gone at once to Suniario with his history, but that, having taken a circuitous route in order to avoid detection, he had not reached Barcelona till the day after Alvar's arrival with Nina in his charge.

No examination could elicit any contradiction in this statement. In confirmation of its truth the merchant produced the jewel which had been given him by Alvar. It was that silver clasp set with emeralds, so familiar to the reader; one of the gems was lost, and the ornamental work was bent and broken, injuries which the man asserted that it had received in the personal struggle for its possession which had occurred between Alvar and himself. In answer to a question from Duke Hugh, he said that he had purposely concealed his discovery of Nina at Medina-Azhara from Alvar, not feeling any confidence in the knight's loyalty; but that he believed that Alvar had received secret information on the subject which had induced him to determine upon a personal interview with the Caliph, at which the scheme for Nina's ostensible restoration to her throne, and for the subsequent delivery of Barcelona to the infidel, might be finally agreed upon. He be-

lieved that this scheme had been in contemplation since the time of Alvar's escape from the hands of Juan of Ripol; that Nina's disappearance had necessarily kept it in abeyance; and that the Caliph, a practised and wary politician, had not revealed the fact that she was actually in his hands till he became convinced that Alvar was resolved to keep faith with him.

The evidence of the second witness was yet more decisive. He was one of the soldiers who had accompanied Alvar on his mysterious expedition to Medina-Azhara. He stated that he and his companions had obeyed orders which they did not comprehend, but that all had been struck by the good understanding which manifestly existed between Alvar and the Moorish authorities, and by the fact that the former possessed a safe-conduct under the Caliph's hand and seal. He averred, in conclusion, that, having his suspicions excited by these circumstances, he had played the spy on his commander; that he had seen Alvar receive a Moorish envoy at midnight before the door of the Lady Nina's tent, and had overheard part of their conversation, which had reference to the time at which Barcelona was to be delivered into the hands of the Caliph.

At this damning announcement a murmur of rage and horror ran through the assembly. Duke Hugh arose once more, his noble countenance becoming dark with impatience.

"Were he my own son," said he, striking the palms of of his hands together, "I would see justice done upon him if he be guilty of this crime! But let him be sent for,—

let him hear and answer for himself! Will no man here do him the poor service of calling him to speak before he dies?"

The Marquis of Orista started forward at this appeal, and would have left the chamber, but Suniario detained him.

"A moment, fair sir," said he, "and you, most noble Duke, have patience, and be assured that I would rather plead for him myself than suffer him to die without defence. But I would fain spare my niece, the Lady Nina, the great pain of making the first act of her royalty one of inquisition and of doom. She is now about to take her seat amongst us. I will pray you to question her yourself on the circumstances of her escape from Medina-Azhara; there is no need to tell her with what object; and I am greatly surprised if her evidence will not strongly confirm the dark tale to which we have just been listening. When she has withdrawn, we can proceed at once to deal with the traitor in person."

How Duke Hugh might have replied to this suggestion cannot be told, for at this moment an interruption occurred of so fearful a nature, that for the time it diverted the minds of all present from the subject which they were considering. During Suniario's speech there had been a slight disturbance in the banqueting-hall, which adjoined the council-chamber, and, though no words were audible, the sound of voices in angry contention was distinctly heard. The door was now partly opened, and the seneschal, making his appearance within it, and apparently endeavouring to prevent forcibly the entrance of some un-

seen person, who, on his part, was struggling to pass, said, "My lords, this rude man will force a passage to your presence. He says that he has some weighty secret to communicate."

"I desire to be admitted to the presence of the most noble Council of Barcelona!" exclaimed the person in question, a swarthy and singularly ill-favoured man, whose face now became visible over the shoulder of the indignant seneschal.

It was Juan of Ripol. Many recognized him, but Suniario first of all, and the glance of his swift, cruel eye transfixed him like the flight of a javelin. Gathering himself up like a panther about to spring, Suniario made but one bound from the dais to the door of the apartment, and, ere the unhappy Juan could cross the threshold, or breathe a single cry for mercy, his enemy's dagger was in his throat.

"Thus perish all traitors to the Countess Nina!" cried the murderer, as he turned to the council and waved his bloody dagger in the air, while the corpse fell heavily to the ground. He was answered by a shout, but it was feeble and partial, emanating from those only who, like the Lord of Palamos, were devoted to his cause. Dark and distrustful clouds gathered upon the countenances of the rest, and the Marquis of Orista muttered, in a voice which Suniario heard, though he deemed it wise to disregard it, "Thus perish all witnesses against the Lord of Urgel!"

"My lords," said Hugh of France, "this is barbarous justice. I speak not for yonder carrion: I speak for your

own honour. In the land where the judge takes the office of the headsman, there is neither freedom, nor justice, nor knighthood. I am ashamed that I have been present among you, and I commend your fellow-countryman, the son of Alvar the True, to the pity of God, for I see no reason to hope that he will find fair judgment from man. I bid you farewell, and I go to tell in France what I have seen in Barcelona."

Shame kept many of the nobles silent at this dignified rebuke; but Suniario, returning hastily to the dais, endeavoured to prevent the Duke's departure.

"You say truly, noble lord," cried he; "and I repent me that I suffered my just anger to carry me so far. But when I saw before me the living face of that traitor who had done such foul wrong to me, to my royal niece, and to my country, my wrath would not be restrained. I had sworn that he should die, and he died. Let there be no strife betwixt us for a cause so vile. There is none here who doubts his guilt."

"We doubt not his guilt," said the Marquis of Orista, boldly; "but we doubt that he had a partner in it."

Suniario dared not lift his eyes, lest the fury in them should be visible. He was silent for an instant, making some terrible vow in his soul against the Marquis of Orista. Ere he could determine what answer to make, the second door in the wall behind the dais was thrown open, and a murmur ran through the council-room, "The Countess! the Countess!" There was a rustle of silken drapery, and all faces turned towards the door from which, attended by her women, *Nina* now emerged. She was attired with

great splendour, and her rich tresses were confined by a regal circlet of gold, set with precious stones. There was a deep flush in her delicate cheeks, arising from the excitement and novelty of her position, but her eye was languid, and her air dejected. She cast one glance around the chamber, and then bent her looks upon the ground, either in timidity or in disappointment. Duke Hugh, remembering that he had a duty to perform which he must not neglect for any private displeasure, advanced immediately to lead her to her seat. The nobles involuntarily closed across the bottom of the apartment, feeling that the ghastly spectacle there was no object for eyes so innocent and tender; and while Suniario, ever active and prepared, advanced eagerly to offer his ostentatious homage,—and while shouts of "God save the Countess Nina!" rang through the room, and were caught up and echoed by the crowds in the palace-court,—the corpse of the unfortunate Juan of Ripol was quietly and silently removed, the door closed, and all signs of the murder so effectually done away, that nothing, save a lingering expression of horror on the faces of some of those who occupied the council-chamber, remained to tell that so dire a deed had just been wrought in their very presence.

XIV.

Nina mechanically submitted herself to the guidance of Hugh of France, and, assuming her place on the throne prepared for her, bowed her graceful acknowledgment of the shouts and the homage which greeted her. As she sat there bending and blushing, with the rich canopy above

her, and the dark fierce faces around, she reminded one of some delicate flower suddenly transplanted into a climate too harsh for it, and very insufficiently protected from the winds and tempests. Even the steps which separated her from the lower floor, with its stormy-looking groups, seemed a defence, and one dreaded lest some ruthless foot should mount them, lest some ruffian hand should pluck the helpless bird from a nest which, though it might be a shelter, was assuredly no barrier. The stately form of Hugh of France, as he took his stand upon the highest step of the throne and still retained his hold of the slender fingers which he had just kneeled to kiss, supplied, however, the idea of security which would otherwise have been painfully wanting to the picture.

"Nobles of Barcelona!" said he, "I present to you your liege lady and my dear ward the Countess Nina, and as ye were true men to her father, so I charge you to be true to her."

"And may the vengeance of Heaven strike him who is false!" cried Suniario, as, having made his due obeisance, he assumed his place on the other side of the throne.

Scarcely was the homage over—nay, the last noble who had advanced to make his reverence was yet on the steps of the dais—when Suniario, whose intense and hungry impatience throughout the whole scene was hardly to be restrained, advanced a little, and, turning himself alternately to the throne and to the council, thus addressed his fair and shrinking niece:—

"Lady and dear kinswoman," said he, "this honourable assembly of your chief nobles desires to learn from

your own sweet lips a few particulars of that escape for which we are all so full of joy, inasmuch as it has given so great a blessing to the kingdom of Barcelona. Will it please you to tell us whether the knight Alvar was the first Christian who discovered your imprisonment at Medina-Azhara?"

Nina, perfectly unconscious of the object of this question, lifted her magnificent eyes as she prepared to answer it. The first object which they encountered was the merchant witness, who had purposely advanced to his former position on the dais-steps, and who bowed gravely as her glance rested upon him.

"Yonder stands the Christian," said she, in a voice whose silver melody was distinctly audible in every part of the room, though it trembled a little from timidity, "who first spoke to me in the garden of the pavilion at Medina-Azhara, and offered to procure my escape; he said that he was a messenger from the knight whom you have named, but the knight himself told me afterwards that he was no true messenger."

The merchant turned to the assembly with an air of satisfaction as his evidence was thus corroborated, and placed in Suniario's hand the emerald clasp, which the latter immediately presented to Nina.

"Is this token known to you, lady?" he asked; "if so, when saw you it before?"

Nina's cheek became somewhat paler as she gazed upon it, and the hand which Hugh of France held grew a little cold.

"It is a jewel of the knight Alvar's," answered she, in

the same manner, but making a proud effort to pronounce unmoved the name which she had before avoided, "and yonder messenger showed it to me to prove that he was in truth what he pretended to be. I know not how he came by it, and I have never seen it since."

So absolute a silence pervaded the room while Nina spoke, that, but for the burning eyes all fastened upon her face, you might have thought that she was surrounded by life-like statues, and not by living men. At the close of each answer, however, there was a slight but general movement among the warriors, as every man turned a little to compare his impression with his neighbour's, though but by a glance; and then there ran through the chamber what might be termed a whisper of mail, as the iron rings of the chain armour jarred faintly upon each other. Hugh of France now took his place in the examination.

"Remember you, dear lady," said he, "how Sir Alvar first came to you in the Moorish city?"

"I was awaiting the merchant, for I knew not that he was false," replied Nina; "and I stood by the garden-gate at midnight and saw the Caliph enter, and one with him; and when I heard the stranger's voice I knew that it was Sir Alvar."

It was now Suniario's turn to glance in triumph at the assembly, while Duke Hugh could scarcely conceal his surprise and mortification. "With the Caliph!" cried he, with unconscious abruptness. "Spoke they together?"

"Yes, noble Duke," answered Nina, looking up in his face; "they spoke of some promise which had passed between them, but I know and understand nothing of it, for

the knight told me afterwards that he had come to the city of the Moors on a secret mission which could not be explained."

There was a visible darkening on the faces of all as this fresh evidence of Alvar's treason became apparent; and the Marquis of Orista, who had hung upon Nina's words with almost as much anxiety and distress as Duke Hugh himself, glided softly through the cluster of nobles, and left the apartment unperceived. Duke Hugh was silent, looking down and playing with the tassel of his sword.

"Knew Sir Alvar that you were captive to the Moor, lady?" inquired Suniario.

"No," she replied; "he came on his own business, under a safe-conduct from the Caliph, and knew not that he should find me there."

"Had he any attendants with him?" was the next question.

"No," she answered again. "We had a Moorish escort for some miles from the city, and there we met the Christian soldiers who were in waiting for their commander."

"Did Sir Alvar and the Caliph speak together as friends or as enemies?" pursued Suniario.

"Methinks they seemed to speak as friends," replied Nina, doubtfully: "there was no strife betwixt them."

"Tell me, lady," interposed Hugh of France, in a deep melancholy voice, "did Sir Alvar ask any post of you as a guerdon for his services?"

"It skills not asking that question," muttered Suniario, with a dissatisfied air, for he little anticipated the answer.

Nina's heart swelled with a painful memory as she replied: "He named not his services, but he besought me, when I should be seated on my throne, to grant him the command of the Marches, that he might keep my frontier against the Moor."

Suniario advanced to the front of the dais, and solemnly repeated this answer word for word. It is impossible to describe the effect which it produced. Hugh of France cast himself into his seat with a look of despair, and the wrathful murmur which ran through the assembly as every man set his teeth and grasped his sword-hilt sounded like the distant roaring of a band of wild beasts, when the hour of hunger is upon them. At this moment the Marquis of Orista re-entered the chamber, leaving the door open behind him. He was followed almost immediately by Alvar himself, who walked quietly and proudly up the middle of the room, through a double phalanx of flashing eyes, which looked as though they would willingly have pierced him to the heart. Having made a deep obeisance in front of the throne, he stood still in the midst of them, fearless and composed.

"Nobles of Barcelona, and you, most fair and gracious lady," said he, "I hear that my good name is called in question amongst you, though I know not for what, and I am come to answer for myself."

Nina, in whose breast a feeling of wounded pride was, if not predominant, alive and anxious for predominance, drew up her lofty neck when she became aware of Alvar's presence, with a gesture half startled, half indignant, and averted her eyes, whose glowing, trembling lustre seemed

almost to partake of the blush which overspread her face, as though she either disdained or could not trust herself to look upon him. Hugh of France started from his seat with an air of desperate resolution, and forestalling Suniario, who was for the moment a little taken by surprise by the unexpected apparition of the man whom he had determined to ruin, called upon the two witnesses to recapitulate their evidence. They obeyed with some hesitation, but the stern Duke stood over them, spurring them if they flagged but for an instant, by some swift question which compelled the immediate repetition of the statement which they had already given.

When the merchant stepped forward, Alvar, regarding him with a look of the utmost scorn, said haughtily, "This man I know to be a liar in the pay of Suniario, Lord of Urgel!"

"Confute him, then!" said Duke Hugh sternly, as he restrained with his hand the furious Suniario (who made as though he would have sprung upon Alvar), and signed that the evidence should proceed. There was a terrible change in Alvar's countenance as it advanced. So soon as he became aware of the direction in which the accusation pointed, he was troubled; as fact after fact was rapidly produced, he changed colour, turning first red, then pale, while his eyes sought the ground, and his whole aspect presented the image of a man agitated, overcome—ay, conscious and convicted of guilt. When the soldier's testimony was closed, and Duke Hugh himself wound up the whole by adding a brief summary of the circumstances elicited from Nina, Alvar uttered a groan, and covered

his face with his hands. All was so rapid that it occupied but a few minutes.

"Speak! son of him whom men called 'The True,'" cried Hugh of France, in a voice so bitter that the hearers shuddered at it. "Answer for yourself! What was the secret of your mission to the city of the Infidel? What were the contents of your letter to the enemy of your country? Of what spoke you with the Moorish caitiff before the very door of your liege lady's tent? Speak! we doom you not unheard."

Still Alvar's face was buried in his hands, and the answer which he gave seemed to be wrung unconsciously from his soul.

"I will never," said he in a broken and stifled voice, "reveal—the infamy of my house."

"Now, by the light of truth!" exclaimed Duke Hugh, "I could slay thee with mine own hands! Hence from our presence! The very sight of thee is a shame for honourable eyes, which yet may weep to see thy father's son stand thus trembling and disgraced before his brethren in arms! Out of my sight, thou most accomplished traitor and let no man look upon thy shame till thou diest!"

Ere the words had crossed his lips, Suniario advanced, and spurning with his foot the steel gauntlet which lay on the dais-step, so that it fell clashing upon the lower floor, he said fiercely,—

"There lies thy glove, thou false villain, and even thus shall every true man spurn thy dishonoured self! Lords of Barcelona, he dies! Lead him to punishment."

The impatient warriors, who stood chafing like blood-

hounds in the leash, scarce able to contain themselves till they were slipped upon their prey, would have seized the unresisting Alvar, and borne him away in an instant, had not an unexpected interruption prevented them. Nina, whose bewildered and amazed mind had followed the windings of the evidence in breathless astonishment—Nina, who had been gazing wildly from face to face as if she understood not, believed not, endured not anything that she heard, and sought for some one to enlighten her—Nina, who now beheld him whom she so loved and honoured, standing in the midst of men unworthy to be his menials, a mark for their scorn, a prey to their fury—Nina sprang from her throne, and with a movement so impetuous and so swift that none could prevent it, darted to his side, and took her place there—her arm entwined through his—her indignant face confronting his accusers—ere any one present divined what she was about to do.

"Punish *him!* Disgrace *him!* Forsake *him!*" she cried; a world of feeling in each emphasis telling, more strongly than words, how utterly impossible it seemed to her that any such acts should be contemplated. "Oh! ye are all mad! Look up, Alvar; thou truest knight in all the world! Look up, and disdain not to proclaim thine innocence!"

As she stood there, her slight figure quivering with emotion, yet with her proud head uplifted, and her eyes, so downcast and so timid a moment before, now impatiently passing from face to face, as if they sought some gaze that should dare to answer theirs, all involuntarily paused, and drew back, leaving her and Alvar alone in the midst. And

who shall blame him that he caught her to his heart, and held her there, before them all?

"Lady," said Duke Hugh, in a respectful manner, which yet betrayed the emotion which he sought in vain to suppress, "pardon me, but you forget the crown you wear."

"I will wear it no longer!" exclaimed Nina, passionately snatching it from her head, and flinging it upon the pavement beside Alvar's gauntlet; "let it lie there—not half so noble as the glove which lies beside it, and which no man here is worthy to touch with the tip of his finger. Oh! Alvar, *why* do you not speak to them?"

She turned and met his ardent gaze, which told how worthless, at that moment, name, fame—nay, life itself—seemed, in comparison with the bliss which she had just bestowed. Shrinking back from him, while a crimson flush shot over her face, neck, and arms, with drooping head, and bending limbs, and hands clasped upon her eyes in a paroxysm of maidenly shame, she would have fallen to the earth had not his arm supported her. He advanced to the group of ladies who stood clustered together on the steps, like a herd of frightened sheep, and, while he stooped to whisper one word of tenderness and comfort in her ear, was about to give her into their charge, when the Marquis of Orista stepped suddenly forward, and addressed the assembly in a manner which commanded instant attention.

"Ere this unhappy gentleman, for whom I may well grieve, since I once held him for my friend, and would have answered for his honour with mine own, is led to the

doom which he has deserved," said he, "it may be well that the council should inquire into the errand of two messengers who are waiting for him without, and who say that they have something of importance to communicate. One is a Moor, and may throw some light on this dark business."

He opened the door as he spoke, and admitted two strangers. One was indeed a Moor, being no other than the messenger who had visited Alvar by night, and whose dark composed countenance betrayed neither surprise nor fear, when he was now ushered into the presence of the council. The other was a grey-haired monk, of mild and reverend aspect, who showed symptoms of uneasiness when he found himself in the midst of so wrathful a conclave.

"Ye are strange comrades, my masters," said Duke Hugh, addressing the new comers: "speak boldly, and tell the council what was your errand to yonder miserable knight! speak truly, for life and death hang on your words."

"Speak not at all!" cried Alvar, undaunted, "I would sooner die at once than suffer you to speak your errand!"

Hugh of France turned on him a glance of lightning. "Be silent, shameless and dishonoured!" exclaimed he; "knowest thou not that thou hast no voice among honest men? Now, holy father," added he, addressing the monk, "speak you first, and let us know your purpose in coming hither."

"I come, great Duke," said the monk, whose anxious gaze seemed labouring to penetrate the precise meaning of the scene before him, "from a poor penitent, who, though

she has sinned deeply, is not, we trust, beyond the limit of Christ's pity. I come from yonder knight's sister, from the Lady Ynes, who four years ago forsook her home, her nation, and her God, and became—all good Christians pardon me for uttering it, and pray for her who wrought so vile a deed!—the wife of the mighty infidel, Abderahman. I say the wife, for some renegade priest was found base enough to pronounce an unreal blessing over such shameful espousals, and the Moor loved and was faithful to her, who, for his sake, had renounced the name of heaven. Yet, terrible indeed was the sin which he required of her. He feared lest the anger of the misbelievers should be aroused by the tidings that he had taken a Christian damsel to wife, and lest the scruples which they already felt at suffering him to assume to himself the title of Caliph should from this derive new force. When, therefore, her conscience had been appeased by this mockery of a marriage, he caused her to renounce her faith, and this (God pity her!) she did in act, though never in heart. Sir Alvar, grieving, as it became him, for a sister's fall, sought an interview with her, that he might, if possible, recall her to duty; and her lord, the Caliph, trusted so entirely in her love, that he refused it not, but sent a safe-conduct to her brother, and himself brought them together. Sir Alvar failed; not then had the unhappy sinner received strength to break her bonds. But I, who knew the whole piteous history, and who had loved and taught her when a child, determined to make one more essay to save her if it were not already too late. The work which her brother began I had grace to finish,

and now she weeps in the Convent of St. Magdalene; safely sheltered beneath the merciful care of Him whom she has so wronged and forsaken. She implores by me the pardon of her mother and her brother, ere she dies; and methinks she has not long to live, for the last dread effort has torn the frail heartstrings asunder."

As the monk concluded his oration, which was listened to in breathless wonder, the Moor advanced, and prostrated himself on the pavement before Nina, who had withdrawn a few steps from Alvar, and now stood in the midst of her women. Alvar remained silent, stern, and motionless; his arms folded, and his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Beautiful lady," said the Moor, "whose face I fear to look on, receive this casket from her whom we call Amine, but whose name among the unbelievers was Ynes. She prays you to believe that she would fain have released you from captivity, but she feared the wrath of her lord. She bids you remember one hour when she pleaded for you, and when she thinks you divined that she so pleaded. She bids me tell you that she then prayed that you might be restored to your people; and that you might tell her own, from her, that she loved them yet, and that she was in heart a Christian; nor did the mighty Caliph withhold his permission; but he demanded a price which she had not then strength to pay, and she yielded. She beseeches you to wear for her sake the jewels which I now proffer to you, and to think—such were her words—as tenderly as you can of one most guilty and most miserable; remembering, when you are happy in your love, that such

a love drew her astray, and such a love she has resigned to atone for her sin."

"Alvar! My son!" cried Hugh of France, coming down from the dais, and laying his hands upon the young man's shoulders. "Forgive me! Was this so?"

"My father," replied Alvar, taking the old warrior's hand in his, and lifting it respectfully to his lips, "was it not better for me to die dishonoured, than to live by proclaiming the shame of my sister?"

There was a brief confusion, during which questions were asked and answered, and the truth elicited in details so easily divined, that it would be tedious to supply them at length. The two witnesses, confronted with evidence which they dared not gainsay, avowed that they had been suborned by the Lord of Urgel.

The merchant had been commissioned by Alvar to carry a letter and a token to the Lady Ynes. This token he employed in the first instance, as we have seen, to obtain Nina's confidence, in order that he might deliver her up to Suniario. On returning from his errand, he received information that Alvar had discovered that he was in the pay of the Lord of Urgel. He fled for his life. The facts which he had ascertained during his embassy to Medina-Azhara were sufficient to enable his master to contrive a scheme for his own exculpation and the ruin of Alvar; and when, by a fortunate chance the emerald clasp which had been transmitted to Ynes fell again into the hands of the plotters, the tissue of their evidence seemed to be complete. Suniario and Abderahman had certainly been in correspondence concerning Nina; but

the precise nature of their compact was never known. It was clear, however, that there was no real confidence between them; and that when Alvar acquainted the Caliph with the true particulars of the case, the latter expressed the liveliest indignation, and at once gave up the person of his lovely captive.

When Duke Hugh turned to address Suniario himself, the arch-traitor was gone! Let shame and contempt follow him, for we seek not to trace out his punishment—we have a fairer task to fulfil.

"Lords of Barcelona," said Hugh of France, "methinks you will all admit that it belongs to my office as guardian to provide a fitting spouse for my royal ward. And I know not where I can find a braver defender for the kingdom, nor a nobler model for its warriors, nor a goodlier companion for its mistress, than in him who restored her to us, and whom we have so wronged this day. How say you, Sir Alvar, will you be content with this atonement?"

Alvar must be pardoned if he answered not, for he was seeking to read his happiness in the only eyes which had never doubted him for an instant. And when Duke Hugh stepped forward and placed one of those small trembling hands in his, while the other strove to cover her glowing face, and repress the shower of tears which broke forth through the taper fingers, and which she was at length fain to hide upon her lover's shoulder, every voice in the room joined eagerly in the joyful shout—

"God save the knight Alvar, and the Countess Nina!"

And here we might close, yet we would beseech the reader to accompany us yet one moment longer.

In the south aisle of the great church at Barcelona, late on the evening of the same day, the good monk and the knight Alvar paced slowly up and down, side by side. The young man was opening his heart, though not precisely with the solemnity of a religious confession, to one who had been his guide and counsellor from childhood.

"Was it well, my son," asked the monk, as Alvar concluded a narration of his interview with the Moorish envoy before the door of Nina's tent—"was it well to judge so harshly the sin of another in the very moment in which conscience had accused yourself of error?"

"Father," said Alvar, humbly, "it was not well."

"Come, then, with me," replied the monk, "and come not as a judge, but as a comforter where comfort is sorely needed. One has been before you in the gentle work."

He led Alvar into a side-chapel, where a solitary taper burned upon the altar, crossing the darkness with a single thread of light, and showing dimly the huge, massive columns, and heavy arched windows, and the figure of a woman in sable garments prostrate on the pavement. She was partly supported by another, who turned her face as they approached, and revealed the features of Nina. Alvar stood still, and became pale. "Who is this?" murmured he; but Nina laid her finger on her lip, and signed to him to approach. He came near, and kneeling too upon the pavement, felt all the sternness melt away from his heart as he passed his arm around that quivering, drooping form. The unhappy Ynes started at the touch, and lifted a face

THE END.

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